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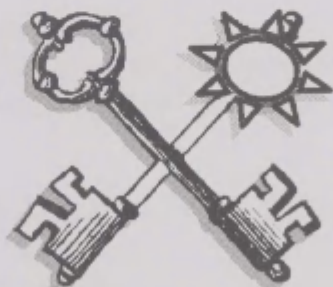
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*Special issue*

**Between semiotics and anthropology:  
Life histories and  
other methodological issues**

**Entre sémiotique et anthropologie:  
Histoires de vie et autres outils méthodologiques**

**Guest editors: Licia Taverna and Stefano Montes**



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## **Foreword from the editors of this volume: On crossing perspectives**

If the reader slowly takes his pleasure on the process of reading by stopping, relaxed and nonchalant, on every single contribution to appreciate its specificity, he may be pleasantly confused by the richness and variety of figures and issues, themes and questions approached in this collective volume: Paul Rabinow, Eric Wolf, Clifford Geertz, Bronislaw Malinowski, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Robert Antelme, Victor Klemperer, Geneviève De Gaulle Anthonioz, Jorge Semprun, Jean Geoffroy, Juri Vella, anthropologists' diaries, survivors' diaries, the nature/culture distinction, colonial memory, Estonian events in the 40s, theatre representation, and so on. Studies on less known figures of camp survivors stand side by side with studies on renowned anthropologists, anthropologic reflections on cultural matters alternate with semiotic analyses of literary texts. What is the leading thread bringing into a unitary path such variety and abundance, such apparent diversity?

In 2006, June 2–3, we organized at the French section of studies of the Department of German and Romance Languages, in collaboration with the Department of Semiotics of the University of Tartu, an international conference "Between Semiotics and Anthropology. Crossed Perspectives on Signs and Cultures",<sup>1</sup> whose main idea was essentially to bring together various anthropologists and semioticians, different specialists of camp literature and life histories to discuss specific problems such as the interrelation existing between signs and cultures and the parallel question of experience and its transformation into a narration. As a consequence, 'signs' and 'cultures', 'experience'

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<sup>1</sup> In French: "Entre sémiotique et anthropologie. Questionnements croisés sur les signes et les cultures"; in Estonian: "Semiootika ja antropoloogia kokkupuutes. Kõrvutavaid arutlusi märkide ja kultuuride üle". As an exception for *Sign Systems Studies*, we publish five articles in this volume in French.



and 'narration' are the crucial axes around which revolve the contributions collected in this volume. They convey, along with essential results in single disciplines, the open-minded atmosphere reigning during the conference and the effort of crossing perspectives manifested by all participants.

More exactly, what the different essays share is the (amazing and always difficult to define) (i) passage from a single sign to a more global and pervasive culture and the (ii) generation of a concrete narration from a fluid and volatile experience originally situated in a specific time and space. If the general and recurrent question posited concerns the definition of signs and cultures, here the focus is laid more on the epistemological foundations of methodologies, on the comparisons of approaches and interpretations of processes. The basic presupposition and aim of the conference was in effect to let disciplinary theories and practices interact in order to see, in this fruitful exchange, how to enrich one another, how to go over internal discursive boundaries and hermeneutical positions. More than a simple international conference, it could be said that Tartu, on the 2nd and the 3rd of June 2006, became a meeting place for anthropologists and semioticians to question each other on their respective disciplines, on the possibilities and potentialities these disciplines possess, on the goals they presuppose in order to seize reality and social interactions. The conference foresaw two complementary sections: a first and freer section on anthropologic and semiotic issues where participants could intervene by choosing their subjects and a second and more specific section concerning survival life histories originating in France and Estonia. This parallel may seem somewhat strange to readers. What do survival life histories have to do with epistemological foundations of disciplines such as anthropology and semiotics?

The first answer is that even if different under some aspects, above all for the evident consequences and tremendous impact on personal lives, both anthropologists and survivors draw on their experience to transform it into a real and true story codified, implicitly or explicitly, through semiotic strategies. The second answer is that the extreme experience lived by survivors calls for a redefinition of culture and humanity and this concept, improved, neglected, redefined, either assumed sceptically or optimistically, is the main theme upon which anthropologists base their work. Any school of thought in anthropology strives for defining, overtly or implicitly, culture and humanity

in a way that is every time more comprehensive and total, more corresponding to modern life and to global world. Conversely, theoretical problems raised by anthropologists and semioticians, such as definitions of concepts and 'seizures' of objects of knowledge, are practically encountered in extreme life conditions by survivors. In short, survivors do a work comparable to the work of anthropologists and semioticians because they try to redefine humanity after a terrible event such as, for example, the Holocaust; they use condensed semiotic elements in their writing; they catch experience through effective signs.

In addition, it is not to be forgotten that survivors tell their experiences, and very often their perplexity towards a positive sense of humanity, by resorting to a written 'translation' of an experience lived in concentration camps, an experience that tends to become a real and true literary genre, that is a literature of its own. By using the term 'genre', nobody wants to affirm that what was lived by survivors was false or invented, but that, once in a written form, an experience is inevitably codified and based on a narrative structure. Contributors of this collective volume explore the most recurrent or unusual narrative structures used by survivors in their texts and the way survivors catch glimpses of phenomenological experiences. Besides it, this issue raises another important point and parallel with anthropologists and semioticians. What is the threshold between the 'literary' and the 'non-literary', between what is considered as 'fiction' and what is considered as 'experience'?

When an anthropologist goes to an exotic place (and even when he stays at home, in his own culture), he needs to live Otherness concretely in his own experience and, eventually, he has to transform himself into a writer, a translator for his 'departure culture'. In other words, an anthropologist is a witness who has to prove his own truth, an individual who adapts himself to the 'Other', a translator and a writer. For a survivor, all these roles are filled by risking his life and against his will. Sometimes more than an anthropologist, a survivor has to find new ways to utter an extreme experience, new ways which disrupt received distinctions and concepts such as, for example, 'fiction', 'literary', 'realistic', 'invented', 'testimony', 'experienced', and so on. This aspect is taken into account in this collective volume both from anthropological and semiotic viewpoints.



In this perspective, camp literature is also extremely interesting to investigate because it amplifies some fundamental dichotomies inscribed in our texts and cultures: (i) the external referent and the internal narrative organization; (ii) the mimetic truth and the narrative structure; (iii) the reality and convention opposition; (iv) the difference between experience and its codification; (v) the nature and culture distinction. In one way or another, survival life histories combine these oppositions in a new manner. In the new light shed by camp literature, the study of these features is pertinent both for semiotics and anthropology. If, then, semiotic modalities through which these events are caught are important for history and man in itself, it is also central to investigate the ways through which these forms of humanities and non-humanities are conceived, imposed, tolerated, reinvented. All the contributions in this collective volume, in one way or another, take into account some directions leading to the better understanding of these central (op)positions present in our culture or in single authors, in anthropology or in semiotics.

More specifically, in this issue one can find a semiotic reflection on the epistemological foundations of some anthropologic theories (Peeter Torop, Eric Landowski, Irene Portis-Winner, Stefano Montes, Art Leete and Piret Koosa) or a reflection on some disciplinary fields and distinctions (Elena Moratidou). At the same time, one can also find an anthropologic viewpoint on central concepts in semiotics (Richard Pottier). In addition, as already explained, some contributions study life histories (Gabiella D'Agostino, Eva Toulouze and Liivo Niglas) and deportation and camp literature (Licia Taverna, Luba Jurgenson, Michael Rinn, Tiiu Jaago).<sup>2</sup>

*Licia Taverna*<sup>3</sup>  
*Stefano Montes*<sup>4</sup>

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## **Semiotics, anthropology and the analysability of culture**

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**Abstract.** For each culture-studying discipline, the problem of culture's analysability stems from disciplinary identity. One half of analysability consists of the culture's attitude and the ability of the discipline's methods of description and analysis to render the culture analysable. The other half of analysability is shaped by the discipline's own adaptation to the characteristics of culture as the object of study and the development of a suitable descriptive language. The ontologisation and epistemologisation of culture as the subject of analysis is present in each culture-studying discipline or discipline complex. Culture analysts are therefore scholars with double responsibilities. Their professionalism is measured on the basis of their analytical capability and the ability to construct (imagine, define) the object of study. The analytical capability and the ability to construct the object of study also determine the parameters of analysability. Be the analyst an anthropologist or a culture semiotician, the analysability of culture depends on how the analyst chooses to conduct the dialogue between him/herself and his/her object of study.

The proliferation of definitions of culture and their frequent disparity clearly indicate that the principles of defining culture are numerous and sometimes very different. Numerous indeed, as we still cannot speak of the science of culture as a single discipline. The second reason why we still lack a uniform discipline of science of culture is the heterogeneity of culture itself. Culture, as the cause of all its definitions, is such a complex object of study that it is near impossible to list and rank all culture-related disciplines by their importance. Methodologist P. Feyerabend (1993) uses the notion of epistemological anarchism to describe the randomness and lack of hierarchy in

the choice of research methods, i.e. all disciplines and all methods are equally valid for the study of culture and we have no reason to regard one as better than the other. It is not even really possible, since even the strictest scientific analysis is but one approach to culture, which cannot in any case rule out the others. Thus, the study of one and the same culture gives rise to numerous and different views and snapshots of that culture, and the analysis of culture as a fragmented object of study becomes the analysis of cultures. Essentially, we can speak of two fundamental pluralities — the plurality of the scientific research methods is complementary to the plurality of culture as a complex object of study.

However, the notions of culture that are born out of different disciplines and viewpoints can hamper the comprehensive understanding of culture, since the synthesis or complementary linking of those notions is near utopic, as it would be to be aware of all the qualities of culture:

Culture is the product of interacting human minds, and hence a science of culture will be a science of the most complex phenomenon on Earth. It will also be a science that must be built on interdisciplinary foundations including genetics, neuroscience, individual development, ecology and evolutionary biology, psychology and anthropology. In other words, a complete explanation of culture, if such a thing is ever possible, is going to comprise a synthesis of all human science. Such a synthesis poses significant conceptual and methodological problems, but also difficulties of another kind for those contributing to this science. Scholars from different disciplines are going to have to be tolerant of one another, open to ideas from other areas of knowledge. (Plotkin 2001: 91)

### **Science of culture and disciplinarity**

Thus, there are two discernible tendencies in culture-studying disciplines. On one hand, the scholars try to ascertain what exactly is being studied and how it is being studied when a particular approach is applied; and what can possibly be the proper field of study for a general science of culture. This implies that culture is not merely an existing object of study that is simply “out there”, but equally a created or constructed object of study. Thus, culture is an object of study that requires disciplinary adjustment for scientific analysis, i.e. the creation of analysability and therefore culture is both a proto- and

metaobject at the same time; it is both immediate and mediated. On the other hand, scholars seek to establish the principles of meta-discipline or methodology of the science of culture that would permit the description of the research results of various culture-studying disciplines on a uniform basis, and thus their so-called translation into a commonly understood language. In one case, the definition of culture is discipline-bound (culture is what one or the other discipline can analyse), in the other, the disciplinary perceptions of culture are described as the parameters of culture that can be synthesised into a comprehensive understanding of culture (as a theoretical ideal). Even if we concretise this problem on a most basic level by moving from the level of general human culture through ethnic and social culture to the level of individual culture, the complexity of uniting those two tendencies will remain.

If we examine the analysability of culture from the 21st century point of view, we can notice two distinct tendencies. On one hand, culture-studying disciplines interweave on the level of methods and the language of description, and the boundaries between cultural philosophy, cultural sociology, culture studies and their subdisciplines have become blurred. Of course, it is also natural that such an intermingling produces new disciplinary identities. The inevitable consequence of interdisciplinarity is new disciplinarity, after all, sooner or later. These are natural tensions, inherent in the development of science, which can be observed in the effort to clarify the relationship between anthropology, ethnography and ethnology and in the attempt to differentiate cultural anthropology from social anthropology, etc. In addition to differentiations and boundary redefinitions between those disciplines, we can also observe such differentiation that in fact brings disciplines closer together. The fact that reflexive anthropology and reflexive sociology exist side by side independently of each other is an example of this. Therefore a few notions have emerged (reflexivity, symbolism, interpretative etc.) that draw various essentially different trends in science closer together via the language of description (i.e. metalanguage).

A qualitative change seems to be nascent in the development of humanities and social sciences. It is related to changes in the emergence and establishment of disciplinary and interdisciplinary identities. On one hand, humanities and social sciences have demonstrated metadisciplinarity already for a long time, which means that certain



disciplines serve as vehicles of innovation or as methodological generalisers. Among others, this metadisciplinary role has been played by linguistics and literature studies, and also by film studies. During the last few decades, this role has often been attributed to semiotics. Whereas linguistics enters the domain of other disciplines and supports methods based on language analogies (language of movies, language of theatre, language of literature etc.), literature and film studies tend to accept more innovative impulses and are more synthesising in general. Psychoanalysis, colonial or gender studies have enriched those disciplines, but they have also given rise to hybrid knowledge forms and prestige languages. Thus, the heterogeneity of those disciplines has been increased.

On the other hand, we can see a lot of dedisciplinarity, which is the cornerstone of cultural studies. The story of cultural studies is a good example of how culture-oriented analytical activities have been able to make their existence a meaningful one. Since cultural practices often outrun the capabilities of theoretical interpretation, the analysts cannot always avoid transgressing discipline boundaries and using other methods and means. Such an analyst uses all available means to understand the culture and in principle operates on three levels — structuralist, culturalist and receptive. On the structuralist level, cultural processes can be observed and explained in terms of the structure of society, a hegemony of a social class or a dominant ideology. The culturalist level allows you to see the ubiquitous cultural uniqueness and interpret everything pertaining to society as culture — on this level, the in depth analyses of texts employ the widest range of methods (semiotic, post-colonial, feminist etc.). The receptive level interprets everything as cognitive processes, since the actual functioning of culture is determined by its receiver and, for example, the participation of a single work of art in culture depends on how it is received (audience analyses and polls) on one hand and its scale of distribution (the number of copies printed, success at the box office, manner of presentation) on the other. As a result, we have a number of parameters that allow us to analyse various aspects of culture without the desire to elevate these analyses to the status of a scientific discipline. In reality, dedisciplinarity does not oppose science, but supports flexible and transdisciplinary research.

Dedisciplinarity is an attempt to establish ad-hoc research as parameter-based and justify it with the need to understand the modern

culture that immediately surrounds the researcher. Whereas meta-disciplinarity combines different disciplines and creates a language of mediation between them, dedisciplinarity connects the different aspects of the object of study and permits the use of different research methods as means to identify the different parameters of the object. Since the primary object of study for cultural studies is modern culture, dedisciplinarity can be seen as the limitation of disciplinarity arising from the "diversity of the object of study" (Burgass 1999: 100). However, critical theory interprets the same phenomenon as the representation of cultural studies in different disciplines and in their methods, assuming that "[...] culture is based on discursive practices and that the subjectivities involved in making it are themselves socially constructed" (Rowe 1998: 3). The diversity of the object of study in this context is inseparable from the (inter)discursive representation of that diversity, i.e. the analyst is aware of the correlation between cultural diversity and the diversity of disciplinary or hybrid metalanguages that describe it.

As a result, we can interpret the same problems in terms of the diversity of disciplines and methods, aspects of the object of study, or the opinions of scholars. This multi-diversity has both its pros and cons. Pros are related to the notion of competence mastering, which denotes the emergence of the analysability of the symbiosis of different competence levels and types. The cons include the proliferation of half-competence or incompetence in education. Harold Bloom has alluded to it in relation to the modern training of philologists:

Precisely why students of literature have become amateur political scientists, uninformed sociologists, incompetent anthropologists, mediocre philosophers, and overdetermined cultural historians, while a puzzling matter, is not beyond all conjecture. They resent literature, or are ashamed of it, or are just not all that fond of reading. (Bloom 1994: 521)

One reason for amateurism and incompetence in university education is the discrepancy between disciplinary identities and explanation practices (see Woody 2003). Discrepancy between disciplinary identity as methodological homogeneity and explanation practices as discursive or metalanguage heterogeneity is in its turn based on the interpretation of the disciplinary object of study and its dynamics, but first and foremost on the relationship between the terminology

necessary for the description of the scientific model of the object of study and the actual terminology in use.

One solution to the discrepancy is to return to the disciplinary object of study and its clarification or reconceptualisation. The other possibility is the clarification of interdisciplinary relations and movement towards a complex approach. A possible example of the latter development can be the movement of metadisciplinarity and dedisciplinarity towards transdisciplinarity, and it is worth noting that one characteristic feature of "transdisciplinary identity" is precisely the introduction of the "critical imperative" to the interdisciplinary field:

A different "transdisciplinary" identity appears in interdisciplinary fields that have a strong critical imperative. In the humanities, certain sectors of the social sciences and, in science, technology, and society studies, the term connotes not only wide scope and a new conceptual framework but also radical critique. Any transdisciplinary effort is implicitly a critique of the existing structure of knowledge, education or culture. (Thompson Klein 2000: 51)

Transdisciplinarity can be perceived as an attempt to transcend the diversity (heterogeneity) of both the object of study and relevant disciplines and achieve a balance in the integration of knowledge products and in the integration of knowledge processes. Of course, this balance presupposes answers to the questions, which disciplines are to be integrated, why and how it is to be done, when it will be done, who will do it and where the integrated knowledge can be applied (Sage 2000: 248).

Whereas in the interdisciplinary field integrated knowledge is based on the shared part of the disciplines and thus also, at least partially, on interference, in the transdisciplinary field the disciplines preserve their identity and the integration process consists of the creation of a complementary synthesising framework. In general the synthesising framework depends on the aims of the research and consequently the role of disciplines may change in the integration process. In a most general manner this functional change is expressed in the difference between the descriptive perspective and prescriptive perspective of the problem solution. Thus, knowledge integration or transdisciplinarity is the most important component in modern knowledge management (Sage 2000: 249). Knowledge integration or transdisciplinarity becomes relevant in areas that have developed

within disciplinary constraints up to a certain point, but have then strayed into the interdisciplinary field and together with methodological and methodic enrichment have become heterogeneous and have abandoned their original relation with their object of study. Consequently the discipline needs to be reconceptualised or at least made more coherent. At any rate, the problems related to the ontology of the object of study (the methodology of defining the object of study) and the epistemology of the object of study (the methodology of studying the object of study) of the given discipline will resurface again.

With respect to transdisciplinarity, there is another important historical problem that J. Mittelstrass highlights in his description of the characteristics of transdisciplinarity:

In other words, transdisciplinarity is first of all an integrating, although not a holistic, concept. It resolves isolation on a higher methodological plane, but it does not attempt to construct a "unified" interpretative or explanatory matrix. Second, *transdisciplinarity removes impasses within the historical constitution of fields and disciplines, when and where the latter have either forgotten their historical memory, or lost their problem-solving power because of excessive speculation* [my italics — P. T.]. For just these reasons, transdisciplinarity cannot replace fields and disciplines. Third, transdisciplinarity is a principle of scientific work and organisation that reaches out beyond individual fields and disciplines for solutions, but it is no trans-scientific principle. The view of transdisciplinarity is a scientific view, and it is directed towards a world that, in being ever more a product of the scientific and technical imagination, has a scientific and technical essence. Last of all, transdisciplinarity is above all a *research principle*, when considered properly against the background I have outlined concerning the forms of research and representation in the sciences, and only secondarily, if at all, a *theoretical principle*, in the case that theories also follow transdisciplinary research forms. (Mittelstrass 2001: 498)

Hence, the history of disciplines and their reconceptualisation should contribute to the definition of disciplinary and interdisciplinary identities. A new interpretation of historical sources also demonstrates that the disciplines defined today may have different sources or the justification of the innovativeness of a discipline is associated with the actualisation of new sources in history. The latter may mean the association of the same sources with different scientific branches.



## Semiotics of culture

Thus, R. Posner links the historic development of cultural semiotics to E. Cassirer's symbolic forms (as sign systems) in his comprehensive treatise of tasks of cultural semiotics:

Cultural semiotics is that subdiscipline of semiotics which has culture as its subject. According to Cassirer, it has two tasks:

- a) the study of *sign systems in a culture* (in the sense of Herder or Tylor) with respect to what they contribute to the culture,
- b) the study of *cultures as sign systems* with respect to the advantages and disadvantages which an individual experiences in belonging to a specific culture". (Posner 2005: 308)

At the same time, J. M. Krois, a leading expert on Cassirer, emphasises that the three-volume and 1162-page opus *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* was envisioned by its author to be a treatise on philosophical anthropology: "Despite its size, it was, in Cassirer's eyes, unfinished. He intended to publish a further, concluding volume that was supposed to include among other things a text on 'The Problem of the Symbol as the Basic Problem of Philosophical Anthropology'" (Krois 2005: 560; cf. also Vandenberghe 2001). From a narrower point of view, G. Ipsen, relying on his attitude towards technology, regards Cassirer as an important source for new historical media semiotics. It is precisely Cassirer whom Ipsen relied on to reach the important conclusion "technology is always the articulation of something already existent in society" (Ipsen 2003: 48). Media development, inseparable from the context of cultural values and practical use, cannot be reduced to technological innovations. The historical interpretation of media thus becomes semiotic due to its very nature and according to Ipsen, we should speak of the complementarity of three branches:

The first is the *semiotics of the media*, which may be understood as the semiotics of individual media. This branch of semiotics looks into the sign processes that are characteristic for a specific medial form. Its subject matter includes any media, ranging from the computer to the stamp. The second important field is the *semiotics of culture*. Having been established some decades ago, its research has meanwhile covered any aspect of cultural life. The third branch of semiotics important for our project is the *semiotics of history*. Though none of the three approaches deals with the history of the

media specifically, all of them have produced methods that are valuable for analyzing evolutionary medial concepts. (Ipsen 2003: 49)

The synthesis of the semiotics of media, culture and history is essential for the semiotics of culture even outside historical media semiotics, since the dynamics of the cultural environment and the relationship between immediate and mediated study of culture are precisely linked to the historical development of media. A valid insight into these problems is offered by evolutionary cultural semiotics. In 1989 W. A. Koch wrote in the foreword to his series *Bochum Publications in Evolutionary Cultural Semiotics* on the notion of culture that it is

[...] a phenomenon whose true integrative potentialities have not yet been fully discovered or explored. For a semiotics thus conceived, structure and process are not different phases of reality and/or sciences but rather mere faces of a unitary field. In the view of this series, then, any fruitful attempt at semiotic analysis will be based on premises of macro-integration — or *evolution* — and of micro-integration — *culture*. (Koch 1989: v)

Evolution and culture are joined in the global cultural environment, which evolves from word and picture media, at first, towards printed media and then telemedia. Today we are already surrounded by the environment of new media. In a most general sense, it is a movement from immediate communication towards the diversification of forms of mediated communication. The technological and historical evolution of communication forms has indeed strongly influenced the growth in the value of history.

On the other hand, the importance of history has been emphasised by Tartu–Moscow school of cultural semiotics. Thus, in the foreword of *Sign Systems Studies* vol. 25 (the last one to appear during his lifetime) Juri Lotman writes:

During the past decades semiotics has changed. One achievement along its difficult path was unification with history. The understanding of history became semiotic, but semiotic thinking obtained historic traits. [...] The semiotic approach tries to avoid the conditional stopping of the historical process. (Lotman 1992: 3)

Building on the notion of semiosphere (coined by Lotman), V. Ivanov already wrote programmatically in the epilogue to his treatise “Outlines of Prehistory and History of Semiotics”:

The task of semiotics is to describe the semiosphere without which the noosphere is inconceivable. Semiotics has to help us in orienting in history. The joint effort of all those who have been active in this science or the whole cycle of sciences must contribute to the ultimate future establishment of semiotics. (Ivanov 1998: 792)

Lotman's treatment of history implicitly also includes Claude Lévi-Strauss's approach to structural anthropology. According to the latter, anthropology and history are very close disciplines, though psychologically different:

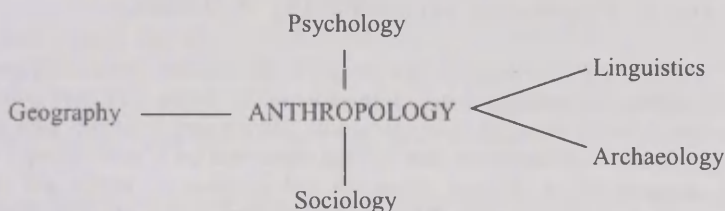
They share the same subject, which is social life; the same goal, which is a better understanding of man; and, in fact, the same method, in which only the proportion of research techniques varies. They differ, principally, in their choice of complementary perspectives: history organizes its data in relation to conscious expressions of social life, while anthropology proceeds by examining its unconscious foundations. (Lévi-Strauss 1968: 18)

The concept of time logically also becomes a focal point for clarifying the disciplinarity issue. In his view, ethnography, ethnology and anthropology do not constitute separate disciplines or lines of investigation: "They are in fact three stages, or three moments of time, in the same line of investigation, and preference for one or another of these only means that attention is concentrated on one type of research, which can never exclude the other two" (Lévi-Strauss 1968: 356).

### **Anthropology**

Lévi-Strauss regarded anthropology as a key concept due to its central location in the interdisciplinary field. To illustrate his point, he provided a diagram (Fig 1). "In the above diagram, the horizontals mainly represent the view of cultural anthropology, the verticals that of social anthropology, and the obliques both" (Lévi-Strauss 1968: 359; see also the chapter "The place of anthropology" in the book: Johnson 2003: 12–30). Juxtaposing geography, anthropology, psychology, sociology, linguistics and archaeology as culture-studying disciplines, Lévi-Strauss emphasised that their difference primarily lies in their perspectives, not in their objects of study, and therefore he also considered the attempt to unify their terminologies to be futile. Lévi-Strauss characterised the special status of anthropology in terms

of three qualities: objectivity, totality and meaningfulness. Whereas totality denotes the observation of social life as systematic, and systematicness in its turn, the identification of a universal structure, the manifestations of which indeed constitute social life, the aspirations towards meaningfulness are primarily associated with the study of social life in oral tradition cultures (lacking written language) (cf. controversy on written language and writing and the comparison of Lévi-Strauss and Derrida: Doja 2006). Objectivity aspirations differ from those in economics or demography, since social sciences employ the methods of natural sciences, but anthropology has closer ties with the humanities. Humanist and systematic interest towards hidden structures and meanings in culture is the reason why Lévi-Strauss predicts the transformation of anthropology into a semiotic discipline: "Anthropology aims to be a *semeiological* science, and takes as a guiding principle that of 'meaning'" (Lévi-Strauss 1968: 364).



*Figure 1.* Location of anthropology in interdisciplinary field according to Lévi-Strauss (1968: 359).

The notion of semiotic anthropology has indeed surfaced by now and its foundations include those disciplines, where, according to Lévi-Strauss, cultural and social anthropology meet, i.e. linguistics and archaeology: "Perhaps the most striking result of this movement toward the semiotic, in both linguistic and sociocultural anthropology, is the way it has helped to overcome an entrenched (and not particularly useful) division between idealist or symbolic approaches and more materialist forms of analysis" (Merz 2007: 344). Thus, semiotic anthropology possesses a significant methodological value: "A further advantage of semiotic anthropology for today's socio-cultural anthropologists is that it supports more flexible and expansive approaches to defining where and how we can do our research" (Merz



2007: 345). In archaeology we can also detect a similar methodological partnership with semiotics — belief that semiotics offers “a common language with which we can understand the structure of contrasting interpretative approaches and communicate across these boundaries while at the same time acknowledging the validity of our different theoretical commitments” (Preucel, Bauer 2001: 93).

Although semiotics is perceived as a possibly useful means to bring internal order and coherence to disciplines, to achieve holism and a methodology that understands a common language, at the same time, both humanities and social sciences nevertheless continue to be afraid of inordinate homogenisation and hierarchisation (cf. Chakravarty, Henderson 2007). G. L. Ribeiro postulates that “anthropology is a cosmopolitan political discourse about the importance of diversity for humankind” (Ribeiro 2006: 365), and claims, “Monological anthropology needs to be replaced by heteroglossic anthropology” (Ribeiro 2006: 364). The ‘world anthropologies’ project is founded on the concept of heteroglossia (introduced by M. Bakhtin):

The ‘world anthropologies’ project wants to contribute to the articulation of a diversified anthropology that is more aware of the social, epistemological, and political conditions of its own production. The network has three main goals: (a) to examine critically the international dissemination of anthropology — as a changing set of Western discourses and practices — within and across national power fields, and the processes through which this dissemination takes place; (b) to contribute to the development of a plural landscape of anthropologies that is both less shaped by metropolitan hegemonies and more open to the heteroglossic potential of globalization; (c) to foster conversations among anthropologists from various regions of the world in order to assess the diversity of relations between regional or national anthropologies and a contested, power-laden, disciplinary discourse. Such a project is part of a critical anthropology of anthropology, one that decenters, re-historicizes and pluralizes what has been taken as ‘anthropology’ so far. It questions not only the contents but also the terms and the conditions of anthropological conversations. (Ribeiro 2006: 364)

Since anthropology’s object of study is in a state of constant change, another of Bakhtin’s concepts — *chronotope* — has been used to describe the diversity. For example, T. Turner attributes pluralism to the change that has occurred in the transformation of the social space-time or *chronotope* from linear diachronic *chronotope* to the *chronotope* of synchronic pluralism (Turner 2006: 17) or decentralised synchronic pluralism (Turner 2006: 22).

The same philosophy is expressed in the 'systematically eclectic approach' in sociology, which is also based on the realisation that "no one same theory may apply to all aspects of social life, all situations and all historical configurations" (Silber 2007: 226). The language that shapes and controls the theoretical thinking of a particular field is also systematically eclectic:

Both humanities and the social sciences [...] have been deeply affected by the emergence and diffusion of new 'master metaphors', as I have termed it elsewhere, i.e. metaphors not simply used to adorn or enliven sociological writing, but actually playing a central role in the shaping and controlling of sociological theory and research (Silber 1995). I have in mind, for example, the impact of such potent literary metaphors as 'culture as text' and related ideas (i.e. genres, scenarios, narratives), as well as a whole range of economic (e.g. 'capital', 'market', 'goods'), spatial (e.g. social 'space', 'fields'), and artistic (e.g. 'repertoires') metaphors, combining or competing with older metaphors such as 'organism', 'system' or 'code'. (Silber 2007: 222)

Linguistic shift has also affected the principal concepts of culture and theory. The concept of culture has shifted towards both plurality and adjectivity — culture as cultures on one hand and culture as a collection of certain attributes or 'cultural' on the other:

Even in the plural, however, cultures were things that could in principle be isolated, analyzed, and ultimately compared — Balinese culture, Navajo culture, American culture, and so on. During the last quarter century, this concept of culture has been further softened and is now more comfortably expressed as an adjective. Questions that so exercised an earlier generation of anthropologists — what was 'a culture', how it could be defined, how coherent or disjunctive it was, how one culture intersected another — seem now anachronistic. But American anthropologists are still quite comfortable with culture as a modifier that denotes the symbolic or subjective dimension of life: 'cultural this', 'cultural that', 'cultural anthropology'. To say that something is 'cultural' still carries theoretical meaning for many, but this meaning is diffuse and not definitive; it depends on the thing that is modified. In the process, 'culture' has become loosely evocative and theoretically fuzzy even as it is deeply sedimented in anthropological sensibility. (Knauff 2006: 412)

The concept of anthropological theory has undergone the same transformation: "First 'Theory', then 'theories', now 'theoretical'. Increasingly, theory in anthropology emerges not in itself but as a

modifier of specific topics and issues to which theoretical articulations are applied, explored, and expressed" (Knaft 2006: 412).

Such dynamics are the result of the constant tension between the theoretical and applied, or theoretical and non-theoretical anthropology. The suggested solution to alleviate the tension between different approaches within one discipline, is the same that disciplines always resort to in difficult times, namely the dialogue within the discipline needs to be increased and, for the dialogue to work, its language must be simplified to the point that it will be generally understood by the parties involved. This process naturally takes place conjointly with methodological dialogue, i.e. striving for clarity of disciplinary thought:

In prosaic terms, it would help if anthropological writing were simpler and more direct. Much discourse by anthropologists, especially in books and monographs, is heavy with in-house terminology and overwritten evocations — long on innuendo but short on exposition. Clear and concise statements of purpose, implication, and relevance would create more rather than less space for ethnographic illustration through examples that are creative, carefully chosen, and powerfully rendered. Structural and presentational clarity throws anthropological insights into bolder relief and fosters greater rigor as analysis is organized and orchestrated. (Knaft 2006: 423)

At the same time, the internal heterogeneity of anthropology has also increased due to a significant shift within its object of study. Anthropology, which has so far studied alien or other cultures, now studies its own culture or the universal global culture. Such a situation raises questions:

How is a scientific discipline which was originally designed as a cognitive instrument for the understanding of 'others' (who, in the case of living societies, were always others with no chance of answering back) now transforming itself as a project in the degree to which groups within societies that are the traditional object of anthropological study start to use this cognitive instrument in order to gain anthropological knowledge both of their own sociocultural reality (in the immediate sense) and of global sociocultural reality as seen from their specific, local perspective? What are the distinctive characteristics of these Other Anthropologies when compared to the originals? How do their emergence and presence modify the whole of anthropology, that is, world anthropology? What would have to change within both dominant and emergent anthropologies to allow us to exploit better than we are currently doing their cognitive potential as single yet plural. How can we speed the

renewal of a discipline distanced once and for all from monocentrism and unitarism? (Krotz 2006: 234)

To answer these questions requires significant metatheoretical activity within anthropology, i.e. the anthropology of anthropology (Krotz 2006: 236).

### **Culture studies**

Since anthropology has close ties with cultural sociology, then it is only natural that cultural sociology is also willing to accept the role of so-called understanding methodology. Understanding of culture in cultural sociology has developed hand in hand with anthropology; the only significant difference is their language of self-description:

We take for granted here many of the changes in our understanding of culture which have been established in the work of the last twenty years, by contrast with (what have at least been retrospectively constructed as) more static, overgeneralized, functionalist understandings current in the mid-twentieth century. These developments include (a) reaffirmation of a shared understanding that cultural sociology is not limited to the study of specialized cultural systems such as art, media, or science but rather that it is an analytic perspective on any social arena (b) a shift to analyzing specific meaning-making processes from earlier conceptualizations of culture as an integrated whole (c) increasing focus on cognitions, categories, and practices more than values and attitudes (d) an emphasis on the ways in which power relations — both dominance and resistance — are mediated through discourse (e) the analysis of three different elements of cultural process — practices, discourses, and institutionalized cultural production, and (f) a shared understanding that meaning-making processes should not be reduced to properties of individuals, as in the simple use of aggregated survey data, but rather should be investigated as trans-individual processes. (Jacobs, Spillman 2005: 2)

And in the present situation, cultural sociology wants to be a uniting and balancing force: "Cultural sociology is the disciplinary crossroads where macro and micro, agency and structure, theory and data all meet; bounded by the institutionalized practices of the subdisciplines it gathers together, it is shaped by the very intellectual fields that it helps reshape in turn" (Jacobs, Spillman 2005: 13).

Mention should also be made of one more characteristic change in relation to cultural studies. The industrialising and ideologising inter-



pretation of culture has become the culturifying interpretation of industry and power (culturification: see Lash 2007: 74). So, in order to avoid the ideological burden implicit in the notion of cultural studies, other notions such as cultural research (Lash 2007: 74) or culture studies (Bennett 2007b: 611) have been proposed. For the purpose of the present paper it is also important to mention the attempt by S. Lash to formulate the aspects of disciplinary ontology and epistemology:

I have spoken of a shift as we moved to the post-hegemonic power regime as hegemony from the symbolic to the real, from semiotics to intensive language, and most of all from epistemology to ontology. Here I have understood the symbolic, semiotics, representation, as basically epistemological and the real, intensive language, and the communication as basically ontological. Epistemology has to do with the understanding of the things we encounter, while ontology and the real have to do with the thing itself that is never encountered. The thing itself, and the real, is never encountered — it is a virtual, a generative force; it is metaphysical rather than physical. (Lash 2007: 71)

Return to the original principles of the discipline and their redefinition under new circumstances is indispensable for the preservation and development of the disciplinary identity. Without constant clarification of ontological and epistemological issues, communication on subdisciplinary levels will be hampered, since the hybridisation of theories and metalanguages will not result in a new synthesis or identity. In a hybrid stage, if we return to original principles and try to clarify them and adapt them to new circumstances, we will, on one hand, have the opportunity to typologically reorganise the discipline from within, irrespective of whether the typology is hierarchical or heterarchical. On the other hand, the history of the discipline, i.e. its self-reflection, will also re-evaluate itself. The situation in various humanities and social sciences today can be understood with the help of science history, the logic of changes in the discipline's historical self-description and of different actualisations of its original sources. The contact of every culture-studying discipline with its object of study is historical and at every point in history this contact has been complicated by contacts with other disciplines studying the same object. And, if on one hand, these contacts fall under the categories of inter-, multi- or transdisciplinarity, then on the other hand, a historical approach, a "radical historicisation" of science, is required to understand these contacts. T. Bennet writes, "...our understandings of both culture and the social need to be radically historicized if we are to

produce an adequate basis for understanding the specific contemporary forms of their interrelations" (Bennett 2007a: 43). We can say that the historical dimension is an essential component of analysability and the fact that the notion of globalisation has penetrated culture-studying disciplines indicates the need to consider new historical realities both empirically and theoretically (see, e.g., Bazin, Selim 2006).

Opposite to the trend of globalisation is the pull of localisation. As researchers, we have hardly reached the level of universal, when we already need to consider the local. Whereas anthropology is indeed the history of cultural analysis, then, for example, the history of organisation theory was for a long time "culture-free" (so to speak):

Traditional organization theories were culture-free because the researcher, the researched and the audience were largely US. Culture was considered to be similar to all and thus had little explanatory power to contribute, except when researching certain ethnic groups or minorities. Now, however, in a globally competitive context, culture is likely to have considerable power (both theoretical and statistical) to explain differences in perception, behavior and action. Its importance is now integral to any effort at theorizing or model building in the international context. (Mukherji, Hurtado 2001: 110)

The eschewal of culture is also present in the history of psychology. In 1996, while presenting his future discipline of cultural psychology, M. Cole pointed out that due to its difficult analysability, culture had been undervalued in psychology up to now and that the mission of the new discipline was precisely the study of the role of culture in the psychic life of humans (Cole 1996). Culture in an organisation and culture in human psyche are rather different matters in themselves, yet there are many similarities in the methodology of their analyses. In both cases the analysability of culture is an important issue. Another important aspect is the relation with environment. In organisation theory it has been described by juxtaposing the high and low degree of analysability and the high and low degree of control (Fig. 2).

In order to understand the diagram of Fig. 2 from the point of view of general cultural analysis we should tie the aspect of analysability with the position of an analyst and the aspect of control with the theoretical position used for analysis and the related terminology. It is difficult to analyse culture in motion, its dynamics. It is far easier to analyse culture statically, since you can rely on (at least operationally) clearly defined units. A high degree of control is linked to proper

research that relies on an established theory or concept and to a supporting metalanguage. A low degree of control is linked to ad hoc analyses, which attempt to deduce the analysability of the object studied and the metalanguage for its description on the basis of the characteristics of the object itself.

DEGREE OF ANALYZABILITY	<i>Difficult to analyze</i>	<i>Dynamically emerging environment</i>	<i>Dynamically emerging environment</i>
		<i>Low analyzability/predictability</i>	<i>Low analyzability/predictability</i>
		<i>Low perceived ex-ante control</i>	<i>High perceived ex-ante control</i>
		<i>Stable environment</i>	<i>Stable environment</i>
		<i>High analyzability/predictability</i>	<i>High analyzability/predictability</i>
	<i>Easy to analyze</i>	<i>Low control</i>	<i>High control</i>
		<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
		DEGREE OF CONTROL	

Figure 2. Dimensions to classify the environment (from Mukherji, Hurtado 2001: 110).

The situation becomes more complicated if we consider that the notion of culture also encompasses its own self-description or cultural worldview that expresses via oral or written communication its individual self-awareness, consensual ideology or cultural perception suggested by the cultural elite (Matsumoto 2006: 35–37). The description of culture of a culture analyst should correlate with this self-description (culture as a system of self-descriptions). Ideally, this would mean dialogue or cooperation between the one who describes and the one described (Chun 2005: 535; cf. also Strauss 2006). Reflexivity-based disciplines have enlisted a new member, autoethnography, which helps to transcend the crisis of subjective authorship in

anthropology: "In autoethnography, the subject and object of research collapse into the body/ thoughts/ feelings of the (auto)ethnographer located in his or her particular space and time" (Gannon 2006: 475). Therefore, the relationship between the self-description and the description of others is an important problem in cultural analysis. Another important problem is the relationship between the describer and the described. That relationship can be either implicit or explicit. It is important for cultural semiotics that the position of the analyst is clearly evident, since the visibility of the observer's position is indicative of the objectivity or the precision of the analysis.

### **Semiotics and anthropology**

A. Piatigorsky, one of the founders of the Tartu–Moscow school of semiotics, has emphasised that the definition of culture cannot be separated from the observer, since culture is a metaconcept, i.e. a concept of description and self-description (Piatigorsky 1996: 55). And understanding the observer is as important as understanding the observed, since "the language of world description cannot exist simply because there is no single natural language that can be used to describe the world as a single object of study" (Piatigorsky 2002: 9). Thus, when in anthropology the problem of the subjectivity of the describer primarily exists in autoethnography and that of the subjectivity of the described in its general theory (Luhrmann 2006; Strauss 2006; Ortner 2005), then in general methodology, description is associated with the use of general qualitative research methods and especially with the concept of participant observation. Participant observation consists of four strategies that may be realised through the direct contact of the observer with the observed, but also as a psychological attitude.

Complete participation may imply an attempt on the part of the observer to influence the processes either on the object-level or meta-level, by his or her behaviour or by publishing analytical writings. A participant as observer behaves in a more reserved manner and is more analytical than a complete participant, often less ideologically-minded. An observer as participant may possess only general behavioural experience and attempts to find theoretical support for it. For an observer as participant, the visibility of his/her theoretical position is



already an important consideration. Complete observation is a theory-based process of relating with the analysed and presupposes the explicitness of the attitude towards the object of study and the study methods used. It is probably easier to operate with different observation strategies in cultural semiotics than in anthropology, but the nuancing of observation is important in both disciplines.

It is easiest to observe the progress towards a general science of culture in the synergy of anthropology and semiotics. Here, the foundation has been laid by B. Malinowski, who was among the first to emphasise (*A Scientific Theory of Culture*, 1941) that the flippant attitude on the part of scholars towards the scientificity of the study of culture is both despicable and immoral. According to Malinowski, history, sociology, economics and law studies must come together with other social sciences to combine an intellectual force that would be able to withstand and balance the physical force of the natural sciences. The first step towards scientificity is the definition of the sphere of study. It was precisely the ability to identify the studied phenomena in the course of their observation or comparison that seemed to be lacking in the study of culture at that time. In his functional analysis of culture, Malinowski distinguished three dimensions of the cultural process — artefacts, organised groups or human social relations and symbolism or symbolic acts. On these premises, Malinowski realised that in culture everything must be studied in context and in terms of the function of the object of study. Malinowski formulated the conceptuality of observation in the modern sense: "To observe means to select, to classify, to isolate on the basis of theory. To construct a theory is to sum up the relevancy of past observation and to anticipate empirical confirmation or rebuttal of theoretical problems posed" (Malinowski 1969: 12). Malinowski's attitude towards the object of study is highly relevant today, the need to be constantly aware of the relationship between the discipline and its subject matter: "Our minimum definition implies that the first task of each science is to recognize its legitimate subject matter. It has to proceed to methods of true identification, or isolation of the relevant factors of its process" (Malinowski 1969: 14).

Without attempting a systematic historical overview of the progress towards the science of culture, mention still should be made of two parallel events occurring at the same time. In 1973, *Interpretation of Cultures* by C. Geertz was published and in the same

year cultural semiotics manifested itself as a discipline for the first time — more precisely, the cultural semiotics of the Tartu–Moscow school (Theses 1998 [1973]). Geertz's book was a clear sign of anthropology moving towards semiotics. The author claims that the aim of the semiotic approach to culture is to help us to gain access to that conceptual world where the studied people live and to start a dialogue with them. Geertz believes that the semioticity of his interpretation of culture lies in the desire to reach meanings. Therefore, he represents the interpreting science as meaning-oriented, apart from experimental science, which is law-oriented (Geertz 1973: 5). Geertz's desire is to move from static description to dynamic interpretation, i.e. a thick description. In order to achieve that, culture must be seen as a text, which becomes an acted document in the analysis process, and not a universal structure (Geertz 1973: 9–10).

Looking at the membership and research topics of the Tartu–Moscow school, we can say that this particular cultural semiotics is a semiotic science engaging in cooperation with anthropology. The programmatic *Theses on the Semiotic Study of Cultures* begin with the following passage:

In the study of culture the initial premise is that all human activity concerned with the processing, exchange, and storage of information possesses a certain unity. Individual sign systems, though they presuppose immanently organized structures, function only in unity, supported by one another. None of the sign systems possesses a mechanism which would enable it to function culturally in isolation. Hence it follows that, together with an approach which permits us to construct a series of relatively autonomous sciences of the semiotic cycle, we shall also admit another approach, according to which all of them examine particular aspects of semiotics of culture, of study of the functional correlation of different sign systems. From this point of view particular importance is attached to questions of the hierarchical structure of the languages of culture, of distribution of spheres among them, of cases in which these spheres intersect or merely border upon each other. (Theses 1998 [1973]: 33)

According to the logic of the *Theses on the Semiotic Study of Cultures*, the essence of culture is semiotic by its very nature, since its foundation is information and communication. On one hand, the study of culture would be possible via the semiotisation of culture-studying disciplines, which would bring them closer to the essence of culture. The birth of the notion of semiotic anthropology is an example of such a development, which, together with disciplinary analysis capability,

would increase the level of analysability of culture. On the other hand, cultural semiotics offers a systematic approach to culture and creates a complementary methodology, which ensures the mutual understanding of different culture-studying disciplines. This is the development prospect of cultural semiotics.

### Analysability of culture

Thus, the intersection of culture and culture-studying disciplines raises questions that the new century must attempt to answer, or reformulate. The first set of questions touches upon culture as a complicated object of study and relates to disciplinary possibilities in the culture-studying sciences. Will it be possible to transform culture as a complicated object of study into a single or multiple disciplinary objects of study? Hence the issue of a single complex science. F. Rastier has raised the question about universal transsemiotics and differentiates between two poles with respect to the study of culture: sciences of culture (*sciences de la culture*) is represented by Ernst Cassirer, and the semiotics of cultures (*sémiotique des cultures*) by the Tartu school. Between these two poles lie the questions: one or many sciences? culture or cultures? (Rastier 2001: 163). The second set of questions touches upon the relationship between the culture-studying disciplines. Is it possible to conceive of a hierarchy of culture-studying disciplines; could any of them, cultural semiotics for example, be assigned the role of methodological base discipline? This implies that the culture-studying disciplines themselves, their capability of dialogue with both the object of study and neighbouring disciplines should become separate subjects of analysis. Therefore, the question that needs to be answered is about the nature of relations between disciplinarity on one side and multi-, trans-, inter-, and dedisciplinarity on the other.

With respect to mutual understanding it is characteristic that a methodological and even ethical attitude towards translation, translating and translatability has emerged in different culture-studying disciplines. Already Malinowski used the notion of translation and that primarily in the sense of methodological translation (translatability). Translatability also implied observability for him, when he wrote about the transition from theory to empirics and claimed "that every theoretical principle must always be translatable

into a method of observation, and again, that in observation we follow carefully the lines of our conceptual analysis" (Malinowski 1969: 14). The same principle is still relevant in 2006: "The challenge of cultural analysis is to develop translation and mediation tools for helping make visible the differences of interests, access, power, needs, desires, and philosophical perspective" (Fischer 2006: 363). Yet the notion of translation is also used on the object-level:

Like a translation, culture is *relational*. Like a translation, culture links a source languaculture, LC2, to a target languaculture, LC1. Like a translation, it makes no sense to talk about the culture of X without saying the culture of X *for* Y. [...] Culture is a construction, a *translation* between source and target, between LC1 and LC2. The amount of material that goes into that translation, that *culture*, will vary, depending on the boundary between the two. (Agar 2006: 5–6)

From the point of view of methodology, the introduction of the notions of translation and translating into the context of cultural analysis is of crucial importance, since it demonstrates perhaps most eloquently the naturalness of the co-existence of the static and the dynamic (see also Torop 2002b, 2007; Sütiste, Torop 2007). Translating a language-text from one language into another seems to be a most concrete activity that can partially even be subjected to formalised rules, if we recall machine translation. Yet translating the same text as a culture-text into another culture we face indefinability. The competences to evaluate translation into language and into culture differ, since in language the translation is a ready text, but in culture the same text is different for different readers and its so-to-speak average evaluation is largely hypothetical due to the mentality of that text.

For each culture-studying discipline, the problem of culture's analysability stems from disciplinary identity. One half of analysability consists of the culture's attitude and the ability of the discipline's methods of description and analysis to render the culture analysable. The other half of analysability is shaped by the discipline's own adaptation to the characteristics of culture as the object of study and the development of a suitable descriptive language. The ontologisation and epistemologisation of culture as the subject of analysis is present in each culture-studying discipline or discipline complex. Disciplinary ontology



and disciplinary epistemology constitute the methodological foundation of every discipline.

Cultural semiotics also has an important historical dimension. It is safe to say that cultural semiotics has developed from linguistic semiotics via text semiotics towards the semiotics of semiosphere (see also: Portis-Winner 1999, 2002; Torop 1999, 2002a, 2003, 2005). In addition to historical logic, this process also follows theoretical logic. Cultural semiotics started from the realisation that in a semiotical sense culture is a multi-language system, where, in parallel to natural languages, there exist secondary modelling systems (mythology, ideology, ethics etc.), which are based on natural languages, or which employ natural languages for their description or explanation (music, ballet) or language analogisation (language of theatre, language of movies).

The next step is to introduce the concept of text as the principal concept of cultural semiotics. On one hand, text is the manifestation of language, using it in a certain manner. On the other hand, text is itself a mechanism that creates languages. From the methodological point of view, the concept of text was important for the definition of the subject of analysis, since it denoted both natural textual objects (a book, picture, symphony) and textualisable objects (culture as text, everyday behaviour or biography, an era, an event). Text and textualisation symbolise the definition of the object of study; the definition or framework allows in its turn the structuralisation of the object either into structural levels or units, and also the construction of a coherent whole or system of those levels and units. The development of the principles of immanent analysis in various cultural domains was one field of activity of cultural semiotics. Yet the analysis of a defined object is static, and the need to also take into account cultural dynamics led Juri Lotman to introduce the notion of semiosphere. Although the attributes of semiosphere resemble those of text (definability, structurality, coherence), it is an important shift from the point of view of culture's analysability. Human culture constitutes the global semiosphere, but that global system consists of intertwined semiospheres of different times (diachrony of semiosphere) and different levels (synchrony of semiosphere). Each semiosphere can be analysed as a single whole, yet we need to bear in mind that each analysed whole in culture is a part of a greater whole, which is an important methodological principle. At the same time, every whole

consists of parts, which are legitimate wholes on their own, which in turn consist of parts, etc. It is an infinite dialogue of whole and parts and the dynamics of the whole dimension.

Yet the text will remain the 'middle' concept for cultural semiotics, since as a term it can denote both a discrete artefact and an invisible abstract whole (a mental text in collective consciousness or subconsciousness). The textual aspect of text analysis means the operation with clearly defined sign systems, texts or combinations of texts; the processual aspect of text analysis presupposes definition, construction or reconstruction of a whole. Thus the analysis assembles the concrete and the abstract, the static and the dynamic in one concept — the text. These two interrelated aspects can be presented as shown in Table 1.

Consequently, the aspects of the analysability of culture are inseparably related to the interpretation of methodological problems. From the ontological aspect of the methodology of cultural semiotics, the static and dynamic forces are defining factors on all three levels: on the level of language, the important distinction is between discrete (natural language) and continual (iconic-spatial) languages (language of pictures, movies or theatre); on the level of text between textuality and processuality; and on the level of semiosphere between narrative (linearity) and performance (simultaneity). Every further clarification also implies the more precise definition of the object of study and the ontologisation of analysability, i.e. imagination of the object of study as analysable.

From the epistemological aspect of cultural semiotics, the static and dynamic serve as clarifying analysis strategies. On the level of language, on one hand we have the definition of the object of study (disciplinary/ terminological) and its dialogisation (finding a flexible and emphatic language of description) on the other. On the level of text, on one hand we have analysis strategies that are based on the characteristics of the subject matter (structural) and the organisation of the subject matter (compositional). On the other hand, we can speak either of spatio-temporal (chronotope-based) or media-oriented (multi-media etc.) analysis strategies, which do not depend directly on the composition of the text or the subject matter. On the level of semiosphere, the line runs between the levels of narrative and performance, the basis for linear and simultaneous analysis strategies. From the epistemological aspect, analysability is determined by the choice of study strategy.

*Table 1. Static and dynamic aspects of text.*

TEXT	
TEXT AS TEXTUALITY	TEXT AS PROCESSUALITY
METACOMMUNICATION	INTERCOMMUNICATION
PROTO- AND METATEXTS	IN- AND INTERTEXTS
COMPLEMENTARITY	MENTALITY
MULTIMODAL AND MULTIMEDIAL TEXTS	MENTAL TEXTS
CREOLE TEXTS	INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE MENTALITY
NEW PROTOTEXTS	INTERTEXTUAL, INTER- DISCURSIVE, INTERMEDIAL, INTERSEMIOTIC MENTALITY
METACOMMUNICATIVE MEMORY	MENTAL MEMORY
MEMORY OF TEXT	MEMORY OF SIGN SYSTEMS

Culture analysts are therefore scholars with double responsibilities. Their professionalism is measured on the basis of their analytical capability and the ability to construct (imagine, define) the object of study. The analytical capability and the ability to construct the object of study also determine the parameters of analysability. Culture as the

object of analysis often dictates its own analysability, which is why *ad hoc* theories, as theories based on their object of study, are in a prominent position in culture-analysing disciplines. Culture analysis and also its analysability begin with the understanding of the object of study, the commencement of dialogue with the object of study, and finding a suitable language (scientific or simply analytical) for that particular dialogue. Regarding the thinking of an analyst, Lotman (2000: 143) has said that "the elementary act of thinking is translation". At the same time he has also added that "the elementary mechanism of translating is dialogue" (Lotman 2000: 143). Dialogue in itself does not mean the use of an existing common language, but the creation of a language for communication that suits the purposes of the dialogue: "...the need for dialogue, the dialogic situation, precedes both real dialogue and even the existence of a language in which to conduct it" (Lotman 2000: 143–144). Thus, be the analyst an anthropologist or a culture semiotician, the analysability of culture depends on how the analyst chooses to conduct the dialogue between him/herself and his/her object of study.

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### Семиотика, антропология и анализируемость культуры

В науках, изучающих культуру, наблюдаются две тенденции. С одной стороны, видно стремление к уточнению того, как и что в культуре изучается при разных подходах. И что может быть предметом общей науки о культуре. Это значит, что культура — не просто существующий объект изучения. Культура — еще и создаваемый или конструируемый объект изучения. С другой стороны, видны поиски метадисциплины или методологических принципов науки о культуре, позволяющих описывать на единой основе результаты разных культуроведческих дисциплин и так сказать переводить их на общепонятный язык. В одном случае культура определяется дисциплинарно (культурой является то, что в ней может изучать та или другая дисциплина), в другом случае дисциплинарные подходы к культуре описываются в качестве параметров культуры, посредством которых возможно приблизиться к целостному пониманию культуры (как к теоретическому идеалу).

Проблема анализируемости культуры начинается для каждой изучающей культуру науки с дисциплинарной самоидентификации. Одна сторона анализируемости формируется на основе отношения к культуре и «подгонки» культуры для анализа посредством аналитических и дескриптивных средств данной дисциплины. Другая сторона анализируемости формируется на основе приспособления самой дисциплины к культуре как специфическому объекту изучения

и вырабатывания подходящего языка описания. Онтологизация и эпистемологизация культуры как объекта анализа происходит в каждой культуроведческой дисциплине или комплексе дисциплин.

Аналитик культуры является ученым с двойной ответственностью. Его профессиональность состоит в способности как анализа, так и создания (обрамления, представления) объекта изучения. Способности анализа и создания объекта изучения определяют и параметры анализируемости. Таким образом, анализируемость культуры зависит от того, как аналитик развивает диалог между самим собой и своим объектом изучения, будь он антрополог или семиотик культуры.

### **Semiootika, antropoloogia ja kultuuri analüüsitavus**

Kultuuri uurivates teadustes on märgatavad kaks tendentsi. Ühelt poolt püütakse täpsustada seda, kuidas kultuuri või mida kultuuris mingi lähenemise korral uuritakse. Ja mis võiks olla üldise kultuuriteaduse uurimisvaldkond. See tähendab, et kultuur ei ole pelgalt olemasolev uurimisobjekt. Samavõrra on kultuur loodav või konstrueeritav uurimisobjekt. Teiselt poolt otsitakse metadistsipliini või kultuuriteaduse metodoloogia põhimõtteid, mis võimaldaksid kirjeldada erinevate kultuuri uurivate distsipliinide tulemusi ühtsel alusel ja nii öelda tõlkida need arusaadavasse keelde. Ühel juhul määratletakse kultuuri distsiplinaarsena (kultuur on see, mida üks või teine distsipliin suudab kultuuris analüüsida), teisel juhul kirjeldatakse distsiplinaarseid kultuurikäsitlusi kultuuri parameetritena, mille sünteesimise kaudu on võimalik (teoreetilise ideaalina) jõuda kultuuri tervikkäsitluseni.

Kultuuri analüüsitavuse probleem algab iga kultuuri uuriva teaduse jaoks distsiplinaarsest identiteedist. Analüüsitavuse üks pool kujuneb kultuuri suhtumisest ja kultuuri muudetavusest analüüsitavaks antud distsipliini kirjeldus- ja analüüsi vahenditega. Analüüsitavuse teise poole kujundab distsipliini enda kohandumine kultuuri kui uurimisobjekti spetsiifikale ning sobiva kirjelduskeele väljaarendamine. Kultuuri kui analüüsiobjekti ontologiseerimine ja epistemologiseerimine toimub igas kultuuri uurivas distsipliinis või distsipliinide kompleksis.

Kultuurianalüütik on seega kahekordse vastutusega teadlane. Tema professionaalsus seisneb nii analüüsivõimes kui uurimisobjekti loomise (kujutlemise, piiritlemise) võimes. Võime luua uurimisobjekti ja analüüsivõime määravad ära ka analüüsitavuse parameetrid. Seega sõltub kultuuri analüüsitavus sellest, kuidas analüütik dialoogi enda ja oma uurimisobjekti vahel arendab, olgu ta siis antropoloog või kultuurisemiootik.

## L'épreuve de l'autre

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**Abstract.** *Testing the other.* It is nowadays a commonplace of academic discourse on social sciences, especially when it comes to such disciplines as anthropology and semiotics, to oppose the old (and old-fashioned) methods of the "structuralists" to post-modern and post-structural epistemological attitudes. Structuralism, it is said, was based on the idea that it is possible to apprehend the meaning of cultural productions from an exterior and therefore objective standpoint, just by making explicit their immanent principles of organization. Today, on the contrary, a totally distinct approach of cultural productions would stem from the consciousness of a strict interdependence, or even of an identity in nature between subject and object at all levels of the process of knowledge, at least in the area of the humanities. However, such a crude opposition proves insufficient when one observes the effective practices of current research. The example here analysed is the account given by the American anthropologist Paul Rabinow of his first mission abroad: *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco*. The analysis, based on the use of a semiotic modelling of interaction, consists in exploring the variety of positions respectively adopted by the anthropologist and his informants according to circumstances and contexts. Four regimes are in principle distinguishable: program-mation, based on regularity and predictability of the actors' behaviour, manipulation, based on some kind of contractualization of their relationships, adjustment, based upon reciprocal sensitivity and various strategies permitting to both partners of the interaction to test one another, and a regime of consent to the unexpected or the unforeseeable. The main result of the analysis resides in the possibility of showing that at each of these styles of pragmatic interaction corresponds a specific regime at the cognitive level as well. This leads to stressing the complexity, if not heterogeneity, of the strategies of knowledge involved at various stages of anthropological research, from the collection of data to the cooperative production of new forms of understanding. Taking the risk of generalization, one might also consider the interactional device, which is here tested through the reading of P. Rabinow's report as a metatheoretical



model describing the various epistemological stances at work and at stake in the practices of research in social sciences at large.

## 1. En quête de l'objet

La sémiotique et l'anthropologie ont au moins ceci de commun, en tout cas dans leurs versions d'inspiration structurale respectives, que d'une part, sur un plan extrêmement général, elles ont en dernière instance l'ambition l'une et l'autre de cerner ce qui fait en même temps l'unité et la diversité des formes de l'entendement et de l'imaginaire humains, et que d'autre part la mise en œuvre de ce projet à long terme passe, pour l'une et l'autre, par le recours à des procédures d'analyse empirique appliquées à des objets ayant le statut, comme on dit en sémiotique, de "manifestations". Peu importe qu'il s'agisse de textes ou de pratiques (de "mythes" ou de "rites"), d'œuvres ou de produits de l'industrie humaine, de comportements individuels ou d'usages collectifs, de normes ou d'institutions, pourvu qu'il s'agisse de productions signifiantes présentant un caractère suffisamment concret ou articulé pour qu'elles se prêtent à la description. Encore faut-il fixer, parmi l'infinité des manifestations qui s'offrent, celles qu'on tiendra pour pertinentes dans la perspective d'une recherche déterminée. D'où un problème de base, en apparence purement pratique mais dont les implications sont cruciales dans les deux cas : pour la sémiotique, celui de la constitution du corpus, et pour l'anthropologie, celui du recueil des données. C'est lui qui va nous retenir dans ce qui suit.

Sur le plan méthodologique et technique, les questions à résoudre se présentent selon des modalités distinctes pour chacune des deux disciplines. Du côté sémiotique, elles ont trait aux conditions du choix et de la délimitation des textes-objets, ou bien, lorsque l'analyse porte non pas sur des textes mais sur des pratiques (comme c'est couramment le cas en socio-sémiotique), à la recherche de critères adéquats pour la clôture du champ d'observation. Du côté anthropologique, le problème concerne la définition de la conduite à suivre sur le terrain en vue de la collecte et de l'enregistrement des données. Mais c'est sur un second plan, d'ordre théorique ou même épistémologique, que surgissent les difficultés les plus ardues. On peut les formuler en gros dans les mêmes termes pour les deux disciplines. Elles tiennent au simple fait, aujourd'hui largement reconnu de part et d'autre, que ni les procédures concernant, en sémiotique, la délimitation d'un corpus



textuel ou la clôture d'un espace d'interaction pris pour objet, ni celles relatives à la constitution des données d'une recherche anthropologique ne constituent jamais des opérations neutres par rapport au travail d'analyse ou d'interprétation "proprement dit", qui, selon une vue de bon sens, devrait chronologiquement leur faire suite. Certes, pour analyser un corpus ou interpréter des données, il faut bien que les éléments à analyser ou à interpréter aient préalablement été recueillis. Mais comme leur sélection engage par elle-même une manière déterminée de découper le réel, elle constitue en fait déjà, à elle seule, l'équivalent d'une première analyse et d'une interprétation implicite.

Très souvent, le découpage du réel que le chercheur prend ou reprend alors, implicitement, à son compte n'est autre que celui que lui fournit spontanément son *informateur*. Ainsi, lorsqu'un sémioticien entreprend par exemple de développer une sémiotique de la "littérature" et, pour cela, décide d'analyser tel roman considéré comme un chef d'œuvre de l'art littéraire, que fait-il sinon identifier l'objet "littéraire" à partir des critères de reconnaissance en vigueur dans les milieux de l'enseignement ou de la critique ? En d'autres termes, il sélectionne son corpus en s'en remettant aux autorités informées, et non pas sur la base de critères sémiotiques — et pour cause, puisque par hypothèse, à ce stade, de tels critères n'existent pas encore ! Peut-être n'y a-t-il pas d'autre point de départ possible, mais il va de soi que le travail sémiotique proprement dit ne commencera que du moment où le chercheur tentera de substituer aux critères que lui livre son informateur social une définition de la "littérarité" qui relève de la conceptualisation *sémiotique*. Tâche de longue haleine, comme on sait ! A moins qu'il ne se propose, plus modestement, de rendre compte de la manière même dont la culture considérée construit la notion d'objet "littéraire" — auquel cas le sémioticien se montrerait sans doute plus proche de l'anthropologue que précédemment. Car la construction du savoir anthropologique, elle aussi, ou elle en premier lieu, s'effectue moyennant une relation dialectique complexe qui, tout en partant des catégories à l'aide desquelles l'*informateur* — lui de nouveau — décrit sa propre culture, vise à les dépasser en vue d'en rendre compte sur un plan théorique plus général.

Il est vrai qu'ici nous jouons un peu sur le sens du mot "informateur", mais on va le voir, ce jeu n'est pas gratuit. Dans la perspective sémiotique, il est convenu de désigner indifféremment par ce terme toute instance susceptible d'être constituée en source de savoir à

l'initiative d'un observateur quelconque ; dans ces conditions, même les choses inanimées — un paysage, la topographie d'une ville par exemple — ont vocation à tenir lieu "d'informateurs". Par leur simple apparence, elles disent en effet quelque chose d'elles-mêmes dès que quelqu'un porte sur elles son regard. De la même façon, comme nous le savons d'expérience, notre visage joue à lui seul, indépendamment de nos intentions et souvent même à notre corps défendant, le rôle d'un informateur pour autrui dans la mesure où, que nous le veuillons ou non, chacun, de l'extérieur, peut y lire (en interprétant juste ou en se trompant, c'est une autre question) l'expression de nos états d'âme supposés. En revanche, en anthropologie — conformément à l'usage lexical courant —, le terme d'informateur ne s'emploie en général que pour désigner un type d'acteurs plus restreint, à savoir une classe de sujets dotés à la fois de compétence cognitive et d'intentions, et dont, en raison de leur statut et de leur position, d'autres sujets, à la fois cognitifs et intentionnels eux aussi, simples curieux ou enquêteurs professionnels, peuvent, dans certaines conditions, espérer la communication d'une partie du "savoir" qu'ils sont censés détenir.

C'est dans la tension qui joue entre ces deux acceptions de la notion d'informateur que se noue à notre sens le problème même de la construction de l'objet dans les deux disciplines considérées. On a là en effet l'esquisse de deux régimes épistémiques qui, bien que très différents et même opposés, imprègnent à divers degrés, l'un et l'autre, les pratiques de recherche de l'une et de l'autre. Les deux disciplines, on le sait, ne cessent effectivement de balancer entre une vision objectivante et une conception intersubjective de la construction du savoir. Dans le cadre classique d'une anthropologie ou d'une sémiotique à dominante structurale, le regard du chercheur, et lui seul, était censé prendre une part active à la construction de l'objet de connaissance, construction qui, selon cette optique, passe par la réduction de l'autre — de l'informateur — au statut d'un non-sujet. Non seulement le "sauvage" lointain (le primitif), mais aussi l'auteur, si soucieux soit-il de contrôler ce qu'il écrit, et plus généralement encore, l'acteur social, ne sait pas lui-même ce qu'il pense ou, en tout cas, ne connaît pas la raison de ce qu'il pense, et ce n'est pas à lui de rendre compte de ce qu'il fait. Seul le savant, fort de sa position extérieure, sera à même de (lui) révéler ce qu'il en est moyennant une analyse méthodiquement conduite des manifestations qu'il produit

sous la forme de textes, d'objets matériels, de comportements ou de pratiques, ou simplement de réponses aux questions qu'on lui pose.

La problématique alternative, qui, à la vérité, surtout en anthropologie, ne date pas d'aujourd'hui et n'est pas l'apanage des seuls "post-structuralistes", n'est pas moins prégnante. Elle se fonde sur l'idée que la compréhension de l'autre, ou du moins de ses manifestations, ne peut résulter que d'un dialogue — mieux, d'une véritable interaction — entre analysant et analysé. Il est vrai que cette option comporte un risque. C'est que, sous prétexte qu'au lieu d'observer l'autre de l'extérieur et à distance comme un objet l'analysant s'implique désormais dans une relation de type intersubjectif avec cet autre, il en vienne à oublier que son objectif ultime reste de rendre compte du sens des actions ou des discours de l'autre et finisse par ne plus se soucier que de ses propres réactions et états d'âme face à cet autre devenu, en somme, l'in-analysé. Ce serait réduire le travail de l'anthropologue ou du sémioticien à bien peu de chose que de substituer ainsi une démarche introspective aux procédures d'antan ! Mais une fois écartée cette éventualité, la vraie difficulté demeure. Elle consiste à essayer de définir une démarche dialectique (proche de la phénoménologie) qui permette de penser l'*interaction même* entre le "sujet" et l'"objet" — et plus précisément la manière dont leur face à face met l'un à l'épreuve de l'autre, non pas psychologiquement mais sur le plan de leurs principes respectifs de compréhension du monde (et donc de l'autre) — comme le lieu d'émergence d'un sens qui, n'appartenant en propre ni à l'un ni à l'autre, ne peut résulter que des modalités de leur rencontre. Ce qui revient ni plus ni moins à admettre qu'en deçà des questions de méthodes, c'est, autant que l'objet de la recherche, la nature même de la connaissance visée qui change, dans une certaine mesure, quand on passe d'un pôle de l'alternative à l'autre.

Cependant, les choses seraient trop simples si le choix se posait en termes aussi catégoriques. En réalité, il suffit de laisser de côté les proclamations de principe (dont beaucoup sont destinées surtout à conforter l'identité des écoles rivales), d'oublier les schématisations dramatisantes chères aux pédagogues et aux médias, et d'observer les pratiques effectives des chercheurs dans les deux champs disciplinaires pour constater que les deux conceptions ont beau s'opposer sur le plan des options épistémologiques fondamentales, elles cohabitent bel et bien sur le plan des démarches heuristiques, donnant lieu à toutes sortes de procédures d'enquête et d'interprétation à caractère

hybride. Autrement dit, il n'y a pas que nous qui nous permettions de jouer en même temps avec les deux acceptions du mot "informateur" ! Et si beaucoup d'anthropologues, de même qu'une certaine proportion (plus réduite) de sémioticiens se montrent aujourd'hui à la fois en quête de distance objectivante et conscients de leur propre implication dans la relation à l'objet, et par suite jouent eux aussi "sur les deux tableaux", ce n'est ni par goût du compromis ni par quelque faiblesse méthodologique. C'est bien plutôt, à ce qu'il nous semble, parce que la contradiction, ou en tout cas la tension entre les deux pôles de l'alternative fait partie des données constitutives de nos recherches. Certes, il est toujours possible de ne pas en tenir compte et d'opter pour l'un ou l'autre extrême. Mais c'est alors au prix d'un réductionnisme pire que le *statu quo* : fuite en avant vers un pur subjectivisme (le "déconstructionnisme"), ou au contraire régression vers un positivisme parfaitement "scientifique" mais stérile.

Loin de se réduire à un pur débat académique, le problème touche donc aux conditions mêmes et à la signification du travail de recherche. De plus, on voit qu'il concerne autant le sémioticien que l'anthropologue. Ceci nous incite à tenter de confronter deux travaux de réflexion émanant respectivement de l'une et de l'autre discipline et qui, l'un et l'autre, témoignent d'une vision dialectique — et non catégorique — des tenants et aboutissants du travail de recherche. Il s'agit d'une part de la "réflexion sur une enquête de terrain" menée par l'anthropologue Paul Rabinow (1988) dans *Un ethnologue au Maroc*, livre qui met en lumière la complexité des régimes de sens et d'interaction en jeu dans la construction d'une certaine forme de savoir à travers la rencontre avec l'autre, et d'autre part d'un modèle que nous avons nous-même élaboré en vue de penser — nous aussi, mais en termes sémiotiques et sur un plan théorique d'ordre général — l'articulation entre plusieurs régimes de construction du sens dans l'interaction (Landowski 2005).



## 2. Régimes d'interaction

Quelques mots tout d'abord à propos du modèle interactionnel que nous proposons. Il a été construit à partir du schéma narratif proposé par Greimas, et en le prolongeant<sup>1</sup>. Pour l'introduire, commençons par quelques généralités.

Quel que soit le projet à réaliser, la démarche à entreprendre, le problème à résoudre ou l'affaire à mener à bien, c'est un fait empiriquement constatable que chacun, dans la vie quotidienne et a fortiori dans les moments les plus graves, est enclin (en fonction de sa culture ou de quelque idiosyncrasie personnelle) à privilégier un *modus operandi* déterminé, un certain style d'action, une "stratégie" de préférence à telle ou telle autre. Beaucoup d'entre nous, par exemple, ne se sentant en confiance que dans un environnement bien ordonné et maîtrisé, rêveraient de pouvoir *programmer* le comportement des autres personnes aussi bien que l'ordre des choses de façon à s'assurer jusque dans le plus menu détail le contrôle du déroulement de la moindre opération dans laquelle ils se trouvent impliqués. D'autres, ne voyant partout que machinations et complots, pensent ne pouvoir arriver à leurs fins qu'en *manipulant* eux-mêmes, de manière aussi contournée que de besoin, ceux avec qui ils ont à traiter. D'autres encore préfèrent se fier à leur intuition, au flair, à leur capacité de sentir sur le moment même, en acte, les tenants et aboutissants d'une situation ou les dispositions intimes de ceux auxquels ils ont affaire, prêts à s'y *ajuster* et à en tirer parti en saisissant l'occasion "aux cheveux". D'autres enfin, écartant toute idée de plan, de calcul ou de syntonie avec autrui, croient plus sûr de s'en remettre tout simplement à leur bonne étoile, à la chance, et se contentent de se *croiser les doigts* en attendant quelque heureux accident que la providence aura décidé pour eux.

Autant de manières d'être au monde qui, tout en correspondant chacune à une manière spécifique d'appréhender ou de construire le "sens de la vie", se traduisent respectivement dans des styles de conduite différenciés sur le plan des interactions avec les objets, avec autrui, avec soi-même. Ces variantes comportementales relèveraient du simple donné psychologique et nous n'aurions rien de mieux à

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<sup>1</sup> Pour une présentation des éléments de base de la grammaire narrative, cf. Greimas, Courtés (1979), en particulier les entrées "Narrativité", "Sujet", "Syntaxe narrative".



faire que de les constater si les régimes de sens et d'interaction auxquels elles renvoient ne s'articulaient eux-mêmes les uns aux autres en fonction de principes structurels qui ne doivent rien à la psychologie mais se révèlent sémiotiquement analysables.

Pourtant, parmi ces divers régimes de sens et d'interaction qui nous sont intuitivement familiers, il se trouve que la sémiotique narrative n'en avait jusqu'à présent reconnu et thématisé que deux : d'un côté, "l'opération", ou action programmée sur les choses, et de l'autre, la "manipulation", entre sujets. En reprenant les définitions classiques de ces deux régimes, il n'est pas difficile de faire apparaître que le premier est fondé sur un principe général de *régularité* — principe qui, manifesté en surface par l'immutabilité des rôles assignés aux protagonistes de l'action, garantit (en principe) l'efficacité de nos interventions sur le monde environnant —, et que le second a quant à lui pour base un principe d'*intentionnalité* dont la mise en œuvre suppose elle-même la reconnaissance réciproque des partenaires de l'interaction en tant qu'actants sujets dotés de "compétences modales" (du type vouloir, croire, pouvoir, etc.) sans cesse changeantes. C'est ainsi que la grammaire narrative a mis à l'honneur la figure du *manipulateur* et, plus accessoirement, celle du *programmeur*.

En revanche, ni le sujet confiant dans sa capacité de sentir *in vivo* les potentialités d'une situation, de tourner à son avantage la propension des choses ou des gens, de saisir et d'exploiter à l'improviste le *kairos* — baptisons-le l'*opportuniste* —, ni le *fataliste* décidé à s'en remettre coûte que coûte au seul hasard, ne trouvaient de place dans ce cadre. L'observation de l'interaction, et d'abord l'expérience même que nous en avons, nous obligeaient pourtant à les prendre eux aussi en considération. Pour pouvoir analyser tant soit peu exhaustivement l'éventail des régimes de construction du sens qui sous-tendent la diversité des pratiques relationnelles effectives, il était par conséquent nécessaire d'enrichir le modèle. D'où notre initiative d'introduire à côté des deux régimes "standards" déjà mentionnés — et qui, en perdant leur monopole, ne perdent pour autant rien de leur pertinence — deux régimes d'interaction complémentaires fondés, respectivement, sur un principe de *sensibilité* et sur un principe d'*aléa* : le régime de "l'ajustement" à l'autre, quel qu'il soit, et celui de "l'assentiment" aux décrets du sort (Fig. 1).

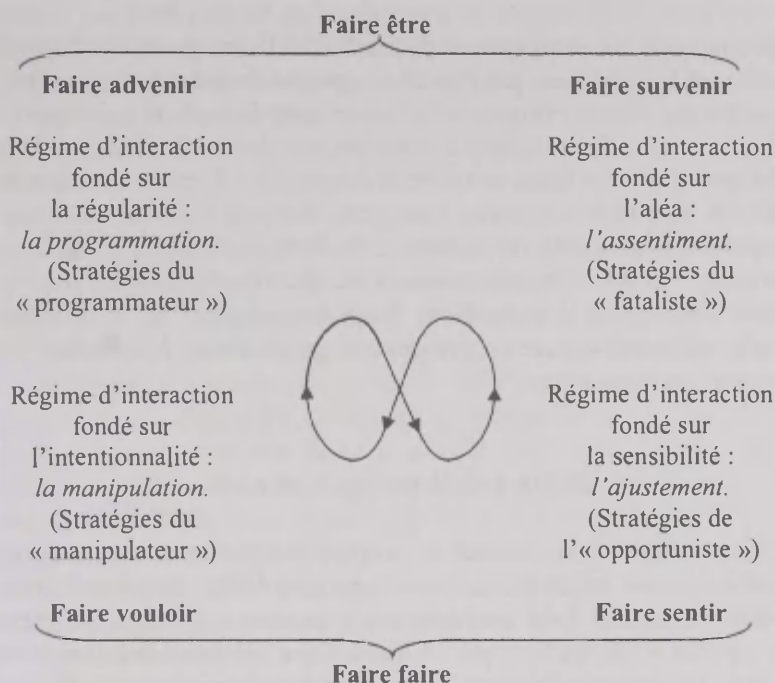


Figure 1. Quatre régimes de sens et d'interaction.

Formant système et ayant par suite vocation à s'articuler et à se combiner entre elles, les quatre formules auxquelles nous aboutissons de la sorte permettent à notre sens de rendre compte de la variété et du caractère le plus souvent composite, hybride ou polyvalent des pratiques interactionnelles observables sur les terrains les plus divers, y compris celui de la construction de l'objet de connaissance dans nos disciplines à vocation scientifique.

A l'intérieur de ce dispositif, quelle pourrait alors être la place de l'ethnographe ? Celle d'un habile manipulateur ? D'un subtil opportuniste ? Quoi encore ? Ou bien, étant donné que ce modèle typologique fait en même temps fonction de diagramme topologique (ce que le tracé orienté de l'ellipse a pour but d'indiquer), quels pourraient être les parcours que l'enquêteur y effectue, amené qu'il doit probablement être à changer de position — à passer d'un régime à un autre — au gré des circonstances ou en fonction des contextes ? Plus largement, dans

quelle mesure les stratégies relationnelles définies par la syntaxe du modèle, et les postures que chacune implique face à l'Autre, permettent-elles de rendre compte de niveaux spécifiques, de conceptions particulières ou de moments déterminés touchant à la praxis ethno-anthropologique en tant que quête de savoir ? — C'est pour tenter de répondre, au moins en partie, à ce genre de questions que nous nous appuierons maintenant sur la lecture du livre déjà cité de Paul Rabinow, dont l'intérêt tient pour nous en premier lieu au fait qu'il se situe à mi-chemin entre le récit d'une "expérience vécue" et la réflexion d'ordre épistémologique — ou mieux, qu'il réussit à articuler très finement ces deux volets.

### 3. Un épistémologue en acte

Au fil de la narration, l'auteur — ou plus exactement le narrateur, tel qu'il se met lui-même en scène — rencontre toute une série d'informateurs potentiels. Avec quelques-uns d'entre eux, la rencontre tourne vite au fiasco : ils ne font pas l'affaire. Ce n'est pas une raison pour nous de les ignorer. D'abord, la confrontation entre le texte de Paul Rabinow et notre modèle serait biaisée si nous ne prenions en compte que quelques éléments du premier en passant les autres sous silence. Et qui plus est, il se trouve que dans le cadre même de ce modèle, le repérage des compatibilités et des incompatibilités entre régimes distincts nous permet d'esquisser aussi une théorie de l'erreur stratégique, du quiproquo, bref, de l'*interaction manquée*. Commençons donc par les échecs et les rencontres avortées.

Richard, Ibrahim, Mekki : autant de déceptions pour "M. Paul", le narrateur, notre héros. Leur principe commun est simple et immédiatement déductible de la petite combinatoire que le modèle invite à construire. Pour qu'il y ait interaction, il faut évidemment, au minimum, qu'il y ait deux parties ; si nous postulons que chacune d'elles privilégie nécessairement un régime de sens et un mode d'interaction déterminé (soit de façon générale, soit dans une situation concrète particulière), nous pouvons obtenir déductivement une série de *schèmes de rencontre* virtuels (au nombre de seize, pour être précis) simplement en inventoriant toutes les combinaisons possibles deux à deux entre le style stratégique qu'adopte l'un des actants et celui — identique ou différent — qui guidera l'action en réponse de l'autre

actant. On peut prévoir qu'il résultera de chacun de ces schèmes des effets de sens distincts, et en même temps des effets pragmatiques diversifiés, du succès presque garanti à l'échec assuré.

Sans entrer dans le détail d'un tel calcul, admettons par exemple, pour la commodité du raisonnement, que pour que les conduites d'un adepte du régime de la programmation aient le plus de chances de succès sur le plan pragmatique, il faille (et probablement il suffise) qu'elles aillent à la rencontre d'un partenaire lui-même déjà programmé (tel un ordinateur) ou, pour le moins, "programmable" (comme le chien de Pavlov) ; que, de même, un manipulateur, pour être sûr de réussir, ait besoin d'interlocuteurs qui soient eux-mêmes tant soit peu "manipulables" ; et ainsi de suite. De telles concordances n'ont sans doute rien d'exceptionnel ; cependant, comme on ne choisit pas toujours à qui on a affaire, il se peut tout aussi bien qu'elles fassent défaut. Qu'advient-il alors, quand un programmeur devra faire face à un fataliste, à un opportuniste ou à un manipulateur ? Ou réciproquement. On doit s'attendre à ce que des déconvenues de types qualitativement différenciés apparaissent en pareils cas, en fonction de la diversité des types de mal-appariements possibles entre les régimes auxquels se soumettent respectivement chacune des deux parties.

Les infortunes de M. Paul procèdent systématiquement d'un de ces divers cas prévisibles, toujours le même. En bon ethnographe, il n'est pas disposé à se contenter d'informations figées dans des discours de convention qui lui paraîtraient pré-programmés par le milieu ambiant. Malheureusement, Richard, la première personne avec qui il entre en contact, ne sait que lui répéter indéfiniment les mêmes clichés sur la vie locale. Ibrahim, ensuite, avec qui il compte s'initier à l'arabe, a beau être fier de sa langue, son enseignement ne dépasse pas la récitation de listes de vocabulaire trouvées dans un vieux manuel. Quant à Mekki, faute du moindre recul par rapport à son propre univers social et culturel, il reste prisonnier de schémas dogmatiques et convenus. Au bout de peu de temps, l'ethnologue se rend compte qu'il serait vain d'espérer entraîner de tels interlocuteurs vers le genre d'échanges intellectuels qu'il recherche, que ce soit en essayant de les manipuler ou de s'ajuster à eux : ce ne sont, en tout cas en ce qui concerne leurs rapports avec un visiteur étranger de son genre, que des non-sujets, des acteurs au comportement étroitement *programmé*.

Or, de toute évidence, ce qui peut être communiqué entre deux interlocuteurs dépend du régime de rapports que chacun d'eux est en

mesure de mettre en œuvre face à son partenaire du moment. Que l'un ou l'autre d'entre eux — ici, c'est l'informateur, mais ailleurs cela pourrait être aussi bien l'enquêteur — s'enferme dans le cadre d'une programmation discursive déterminée, aussitôt cela affecte le statut de l'information transmise et, d'un point de vue anthropologique, sa valeur. Un "bon" enquêteur devrait donc être capable au moins de deux choses : de repérer les réponses préfabriquées qu'on lui adresse, et de trouver (lorsque c'est possible) le moyen de substituer aux rapports intersubjectifs de convention que sa posture professionnelle tend à susciter un régime d'interaction plus ouvert qui lui permette d'obtenir de la part de l'enquêté un discours plus libre et par suite, avec un peu de chance, plus éclairant. — Réciproquement, un "bon" informateur ne saurait être au fond que celui qui, capable premièrement de reconnaître les *questions* préformatées que se croirait en devoir de lui poser un ethnographe trop bien programmé (par exemple, trop enclin à suivre à la lettre les manuels de méthode et les guides de comportement sur le terrain), saurait ensuite comment amener son interlocuteur — l'enquêteur — à se poser à lui-même des questions moins rebattues et à lui en adresser, à lui l'enquêté, de moins ennuyeuses et peut-être, du coup, de plus judicieuses.

Nous ne retiendrions pas l'idée, un peu impertinente bien que rigoureusement logique, d'une telle inversion des rôles si le récit de Paul Rabinow ne soulignait lui-même à quel point l'enquêteur a besoin d'une participation active de l'enquêté pour que l'échange devienne fructueux. Voyons à cet égard ce qu'il en est des rencontres du narrateur avec Ali, Rashid puis Malik, et finalement Driss ben Mohammed.

"Ali était un informateur remarquable". Le texte le décrit comme un homme de caractère, à l'esprit et au comportement très libres (à tel point qu'il s'en trouve socialement marginalisé), et toujours plein d'initiative. C'est presque un petit bandit ! "M. Paul" lui doit néanmoins beaucoup, y compris sur un plan à première vue extra-professionnel. Guidé par lui, il passera "la plus belle journée" qu'il lui fut donné de passer au Maroc (Rabinow 1988: 64-70). Ce jour-là, Ali ayant eu l'idée de l'inviter à l'accompagner pour une promenade en montagne avec deux de ses amies, il se laisse entraîner dans une "expérience étonnante" à la faveur de laquelle il va perdre peu à peu, avec ravissement, tous ses repères habituels :



Je ne voyais pas du tout où nous allions [...] ; de temps à autre, je m'avisais que les séquences n'obéissaient à aucune cohérence, que les orientations et les relations causales étaient fautives [...] ; je sentais une jubilation croissante, comme si nous abandonnions aussi toute inhibition personnelle, toute convention sociale.

En un mot, "c'était l'aventure". Aucune norme ordinaire de conduite, aucune programmation du temps, de l'action, du discours n'a plus cours : notre héros se trouve transporté dans un monde aux antipodes de la régularité rassurante du quotidien, un monde du tout-est-possible, de l'accident heureux auquel il consent par avance : "nous nous laissons simplement porter par le flot des événements". On ne saurait mieux illustrer ce que nous appelions plus haut le régime de l'*assentiment* à l'aléa.

Le "sentiment d'euphorie et d'amicale complicité" éprouvé ponctuellement à l'occasion de cette idyllique journée "d'aventure" par les deux compères (qui n'en restent pas moins, l'un vis-à-vis de l'autre, "l'ethnologue" et son "informateur") contribuera à renforcer entre eux un lien déjà établi au fil du temps dans le cadre d'un autre régime, plus prosaïque, celui de la *manipulation* réciproque. Le récit ne donne guère de précisions sur la manière dont l'ethnologue obtient au jour le jour la coopération d'Ali. Il se borne à évoquer les motivations générales, "surtout pragmatiques" selon lui, qu'il lui suppose, et qui, d'ailleurs, seront les mêmes par la suite dans le cas, par exemple, de Malik ou de Rashid : en échange de leur travail, ils comptent sur un petit revenu, éventuellement quelques menus services (à un moment donné, M. Paul servira de chauffeur à pratiquement tout le village) et un certain gain de prestige devant leur entourage (surtout pour Rashid, qui "se pavane dans la notoriété acquise par son travail avec l'ethnologue").

A ce style de relations interpersonnelles correspond de nouveau une délimitation assez précise de la nature et la valeur de l'information recueillie par l'ethnologue. Avec Rashid, et plus encore avec Malik — dans son cas, ce régime d'échanges prendra la forme d'un véritable contrat, renouvelable de mois en mois —, la collaboration ne dépassera que difficilement les limites d'un travail "assez mécanique" portant sur des tâches "bien délimitées" tels le tracé des généalogies, la description du régime foncier, du réseau d'irrigation ou du système de parenté. Autrement dit, on reste alors dans le cadre d'une épistémologie objectivante très classique, et cela, apparemment, dans la mesure

même où l'interaction s'inscrit strictement dans le cadre de rapports contractuels. Mieux, plus ces rapports sont formalisés, plus le cadre épistémologique du travail d'enquête mené à deux paraît étroit.

Au contraire, avec Ali, c'est un lien d'affinité réciproque, d'ordre purement "amical", qui, malgré des brouilles passagères, va se nouer et s'épanouir sur la base de "relations de réciprocité libres et sans contraintes, relativement non définies". Dans ce cadre, Ali apportera à l'ethnologue une aide décisive pour l'approfondissement de sa problématique. Dans les termes de notre modèle, cette nouvelle forme de relation nous fait passer du régime de la manipulation à celui de l'*ajustement*, régime plus risqué où l'interaction se joue souvent à la limite de l'accident. Ali s'y révèle excellent, et l'ethnographe assez bon à l'occasion d'un incident qu'il nous faut résumer (Rabinow 1988 : 48-55).

Ali, une fois de plus, avait invité M. Paul à l'accompagner, maintenant à un mariage. Il lui avait promis qu'ils ne s'y attarderaient pas trop longtemps. Mais la promesse ne sera pas tenue : une fois sur place, tandis que la fête se prolonge tard dans la nuit, l'ethnologue attend, se morfond, s'irrite de plus en plus à mesure que les heures passent. Après quoi, enfin sur le chemin du retour, au volant, il boude. "Es-tu heureux ?" lui demande d'abord Ali. Puis, insistant : "Mais pourquoi es-tu malheureux ?" Et finalement, à trois reprises, la dernière en ouvrant la portière et menaçant de sauter en marche : "Si tu es malheureux, alors je m'en retourne à pied". L'ethnologue arrête la voiture, le laisse descendre, repart sans lui — la mort dans l'âme : la brouille va-t-elle être définitive ?

En termes narratifs, la provocation, dont on a ici un bon exemple, constitue une des figures répertoriées de la manipulation. Elle joue sur les connotations dévalorisantes de l'image que le manipulateur prétend se faire de celui qu'il cherche à manipuler, l'idée étant que le second accomplira le programme voulu par le premier dans le but de lui prouver (et peut-être de se prouver) qu'il n'est pas si incapable, si faible, si lâche ou si mauvais que l'autre le croit ou fait semblant de le croire. Mais en l'occurrence, Ali ne cherche à faire faire par M. Paul rien de particulier, et certainement pas à obtenir qu'il le fasse descendre de sa voiture. En le mettant au défi de l'abandonner en rase campagne, il ne vise aucun objectif d'ordre pragmatique. Son seul but, comme le dit à deux reprises le narrateur, est de "mettre à l'épreuve" son interlocuteur, de mesurer son degré de résistance, de l'évaluer en

tant que partenaire d'une interaction qui pourra ou bien s'arrêter là si l'autre ne se montre pas à la hauteur, ou bien, au contraire, prendre un nouveau départ s'il se révèle capable de répondre adéquatement à son geste.

Un peu par hasard, il se trouve que la fermeté dont l'anthropologue témoigne par sa réaction constitue précisément la bonne réponse — la réponse juste — du point de vue de son partenaire. Par son intransigeance, M. Paul permet en effet à Ali de sentir qu'il a face à lui un homme, si on peut dire, de sa propre trempe. La manipulation, qui n'était en l'occurrence qu'une sorte de leurre — qu'un procédé tactique subordonné à une fin stratégique le dépassant —, n'aura donc servi, ici, qu'à tester la possibilité d'un *ajustement* entre deux hexis, deux manières d'être-au-monde<sup>2</sup>. “Dans une autre situation, peut-être mon geste se serait-il révélé irréparable. Mais au Maroc, jouer avec le feu est chose usuelle, quotidienne, et en user avec finesse une nécessité vitale”. Il n'y a, à vrai dire, pas qu'au Maroc qu'il faille “jouer avec le feu” pour que deux sensibilités, deux tempéraments ou même deux esprits (pour peu qu'ils soient un peu vifs) parviennent à s'ajuster l'un à l'autre. L'acceptation du risque de catastrophe, l'assentiment anticipé à l'accident éventuel, représentent au contraire d'une manière générale une donnée constitutive de ce régime où, par construction, les potentialités de l'interaction ne se révèlent pleinement qu'au seuil de la rupture possible entre les protagonistes. Toujours est-il qu'à la suite de cet affrontement qui aurait pu tourner à la catastrophe, loin de se distendre, les liens entre les deux hommes se resserrent : “nous fûmes depuis lors les meilleurs amis du monde”. Et cela n'est pas sans conséquences sur le plan de la conduite de l'enquête ethnographique : “Ce fut seulement après cet incident qu'Ali commença à me révéler deux aspects de sa vie qu'il avait précédemment dissimulés”.

Cependant, la tâche d'un ethnographe n'est pas simplement d'établir de bons rapports avec ses informateurs, ce qui reviendrait au fond, de sa part, à payer de sourires les “révélation” ponctuelles qu'on voudrait bien lui faire. Ce qui importe davantage, c'est le fait qu'ici encore une fois, le passage d'un régime de sens et d'interaction à un autre va de pair avec un saut qualitatif concernant aussi les modalités

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<sup>2</sup> Le narrateur relève aussi, en passant, une autre tactique coutumière chez Ali pour “sonder l'autre” : son humour, “plus explosif et personnalisé” que les “plaisanteries mesurées” auxquelles s'en tiennent les autres informateurs.

de l'interaction entre enquêteur et enquêté sur le plan *cognitif* lui-même. A partir du moment où deux partenaires ont, comme Ali et son chauffeur du jour, éprouvé qu'il leur est possible de "s'entendre" par ajustement sur un plan en quelque sorte existentiel, il y a des chances pour que s'ouvre plus facilement entre eux la possibilité d'interagir positivement dans des termes comparables également sur le plan intellectuel. C'est ce que le narrateur confirme : "avec Ali vint à émerger un terrain d'entente et d'expériences communes aménagé grâce à nos efforts mutuels, un domaine du sens commun". Et la forme même de leur confrontation, où chacun, par de petites provocations, sonde l'autre et le pousse à se dépasser, est identique sur les deux plans. Au fil de leur travail de réflexion sur ce qui les rend chacun autre vis-à-vis de l'autre en même temps que face à la réalité sociale et politique qu'ils ont prise en commun pour objet, chacun se trouve tour à tour "perturbé dans sa démarche usuelle", tout comme chacun avait été troublé par le geste de l'autre dans l'incident du mariage. Sur le plan affectif et psychologique comme sur le plan intellectuel, l'ajustement est un processus "dialectique" selon l'acception même de ce terme sous la plume de Paul Rabinow : "ni le sujet ni l'objet n'y demeurent statiques".

Dans le cadre contractuel caractéristique du régime de la manipulation, une certaine quantité d'information était fournie à l'ethnographe à proportion de ce qu'il était susceptible de proposer en échange. Réglé sur le mode du donnant-donnant, un tel système avait vocation à porter essentiellement sur des transferts d'objets, les uns cognitifs, les autres non (de l'argent, des services, des cadeaux), mais tous à caractère discret et d'une valeur de préférence quantifiable. En revanche, sous le régime de l'ajustement, ce qui est en jeu n'est plus la transmission d'informations moyennant juste contrepartie mais la production même d'une forme de connaissance toute différente puisque, loin de préexister — comme une marchandise en stock — à la passation d'un contrat entre les partenaires de la communication, elle doit être construite par eux-mêmes, ensemble, en sorte que s'il parviennent effectivement à la construire, elle n'existera finalement que comme le fruit de leur coopération. Il ne saurait par conséquent plus être question ici d'une quelconque phase de "recueil" de l'information à considérer comme distincte du travail "d'interprétation". En fait, il n'y a même plus de "données" à proprement parler mais, selon les termes de Paul Rabinow, un pur "rapport d'interaction entre enquêté et en-



quêteur". La forme de savoir anthropologique qui peut se constituer dans l'espace de ce rapport sera par construction plus proche de la compréhension phénoménologique que d'une problématique de l'information et de son traitement.

On comprend ainsi que ce soit à Ali, ce maître de l'ajustement, que le narrateur déclare en conclusion devoir son "appréhension de la culture marocaine dans son immédiateté, en tant qu'expérience vécue". Pourtant, c'est finalement avec Driss ben Mohammed que le narrateur nous dit avoir ressenti la possibilité "d'aller plus loin" qu'avec tous ses autres informateurs. Avec lui, l'expérience de terrain devait atteindre des "profondeurs affectives et intellectuelles nouvelles". Il n'est pas facile, à la lecture du court chapitre final, consacré précisément à cette ultime rencontre, de déceler exactement ce qui, aux yeux du narrateur, en fait l'expérience la plus riche de toutes. On y retrouve l'ensemble des composantes relevées au fil des développements précédents : l'aléa et la programmation, posés comme deux contraires : "Au hasard, sans projets ou programmes concertés [...] nous eûmes une série de conversations à bâtons rompus" ; la manipulation, évoquée également en négatif : "Ben Mohammed n'avait pas peur de moi [...], il ne chercha pas non plus à tirer profit de moi (il refusait presque tous les cadeaux)" ; et pour finir, par dessus tout, l'ajustement.

Or la profondeur exceptionnelle de cette amitié ne tiendrait-elle pas, précisément, à la forme particulière — sublimée ? — d'ajustement intellectuel auquel parviennent les deux hommes, une forme qui se déploie apparemment dans un pur rapport "d'esprit à esprit", comme libéré du contexte social immédiat ? Tous les autres informateurs étaient fortement influencés, jusque dans leur manière de penser, par la pression de leur milieu. Mekki, exemple type du locuteur programmé, qui avait été "littéralement imposé" à l'ethnologue par le village, parle une sorte de langue de bois. "A cela, nul remède". Malik, bien que l'esprit beaucoup plus délié, n'a pas non plus une parole libre : conservateur, affectivement très solidaire de son groupe, il se laisse au fond manipuler par la communauté : "il était le parfait représentant de l'orthodoxie". A l'opposé, Rashid et, plus nettement encore, Ali, sont tous deux "en position de porte-à-faux" par rapport à la vie villageoise, en sorte que leurs discours de "rebelles" et leur côté "aventureux", délibérément cultivés pour s'opposer à la communauté, en sont d'une certaine façon le reflet : ils restent ainsi, malgré eux, inexorablement



“imbriqués dans le réseau de leur propre univers local”. Les rencontres avec Driss ben Mohammed échappent à tout cela. Elles se déroulent loin des routines programmées du quotidien aussi bien qu’à l’écart des manipulations clochemerliennes. Et, tout imprégnées d’une sorte de sérénité bucolique, elles ne laissent aucune part à l’attente d’événements aléatoires ou providentiels. “Nous étions assis à flanc de coteau sous les figuiers, une paire d’amis passant ensemble un brûlant après-midi d’été sous un ciel sans nuages” : espace idéal pour une recherche conçue comme forme de vie à la fois intérieure et partagée, un peu à la manière socratique : “deux sujets connaissants, confrontés l’un à l’autre”.

Sur cette scène, le livre, ou plutôt le *récit*, s’achève. Car la partie narrative est encadrée par deux morceaux d’une autre nature : une conclusion de l’auteur, qui tire la “morale” — anthropologique — du récit, et (dans l’édition française) une préface de Pierre Bourdieu, qui statue — magistralement — sur le tout. Entre les deux, donc, le discours de “M. Paul”, à la fois narrateur et héros à la Ulysse (“Je quittai Chicago [...]” ... “[...] j’étais de retour” — Rabinow 1988: 15 et 133). Qui est donc, finalement, ce “je” auquel la parole est déléguée ? Un pur simulacre, rendu crédible par la magie d’une écriture habilement tournée ? Cela est possible mais peu importe. A la limite, il n’y a peut-être même jamais eu aucun “ethnologue au Maroc” du nom de M. Paul ! Peut-être que toute cette aventure n’est que fiction et que “Paul Rabinow” — ou celui qui se donne ce nom sur la couverture — n’est qu’un bon faiseur de roman. En ce cas, et c’est ce qui importe, le roman est bon, à deux points de vue. Esthétique, car il se lit agréablement. Et à proprement parler, scientifique, parce que, fictif ou non, le texte met en scène le travail même d’une recherche : M. Paul, simple être de papier ou véritable ethnologue au Maroc, est dans tous les cas un authentique *épistémologue*, et qui plus est, *en acte*. De ce point de vue, l’expérience rapportée en son nom, quel que soit le statut énonciatif qu’on voudra lui attribuer, revêt en elle-même une portée tout à fait générale, et c’est à cela que tient sa valeur.

A chacun des régimes d’interaction par lesquels passe la quête d’intelligibilité qui nous est contée correspond un régime de savoir différent. D’un de ces régimes à l’autre, le caractère *inter-actif* du processus de connaissance est très inégalement marqué. Quand l’ethnographe a affaire à un locuteur programmé (qui ne sait que réciter sa leçon), c’est à l’enquêteur et lui seul qu’il revient d’agir, et encore

bien peu puisqu'au fond son rôle se limite alors à enclencher (selon une sorte de schéma stimulus-réponse) la récitation par l'enquêté d'un discours déjà tout prêt. Et si au contraire l'ethnographe lui-même était trop "programmé", si par exemple il n'avait appris à voir en l'autre que l'image qu'en donne sa propre culture, il aurait encore moins à interagir avec ses informateurs puisqu'il lui suffirait alors de les observer du dehors pour retrouver en eux tout ce qu'il en savait déjà avant de les rencontrer<sup>3</sup>. C'est aussi à une relation à coefficient interactif très faible, ou même nul, que donne lieu le régime de l'aléa : à la limite, l'enquêteur n'a ici rien de mieux à faire que d'attendre patiemment la révélation providentielle, l'illumination que l'autre, sans le vouloir ni même probablement le savoir, lui procurera par accident, sans que rien lui ait été demandé (Greimas 1979).

Il y a en revanche interaction au sens plein du terme dans les deux autres configurations. Entre manipulateur et manipulé, la transmission du savoir s'inscrit dans un cadre à la fois contractuel, où chacun a à défendre ses intérêts propres, tant pragmatiques que cognitifs, et dialogique, où les réponses de l'enquêté sont fonction de la pertinence des questions de l'enquêteur ; le savoir est donc cette fois l'enjeu de toutes sortes de stratégies : on se persuade, se dissuade, on cache, on feint, on menace, on promet, on provoque. Mais ces interactions ne sortent pas d'un cadre fonctionnel — on manipule *pour* savoir —, et le savoir qu'elles ont pour enjeu reste en quelque sorte extérieur à l'interagir lui-même. Au contraire, les deux aspects, connaissance et interaction, se rejoignent et même finissent par se confondre dans la dynamique de cette sorte de danse de l'interlocution qu'engage le processus de l'ajustement mutuel : sous ce dernier régime, c'est le processus même de reconnaissance réciproque dans le mouvement de la pensée qui a valeur de découverte.

Notre propos n'était certes pas, au départ, d'enfermer l'ethnologue (ni a fortiori le sémioticien) dans l'une ou l'autre des cases d'un modèle prédéfini ! Telle est encore moins notre intention à l'arrivée. Au contraire, la manière dont le texte analysé conduit à préciser les conditions de fonctionnement, les implications et les limites respectives de chacun des régimes inventoriés, mais aussi les interférences ou

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Landowski 1997, en particulier le chapitre *Voyageurs et passagers* (99–109).

les chevauchements qui complexifient leurs rapports, nous invite surtout à enrichir le modèle.

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## Испытание Другого

В современном академическом дискурсе социальных наук, особенно в таких дисциплинах, как антропология и семиотика, стало традицией противопоставление старой (и устаревшей) методики структуралистов и эпистемологических высказываний постмодернистов и постструктуралистов. Структурализм по утверждению зиждется на идее, что, объяснив внутреннее строение продукта культуры, возможно понять его значение с внешней (и, следовательно, объективной) точки зрения. По крайней мере, гуманитарные науки в настоящее время подходят к явлениям культуры с совершенно противоположной стороны, остро сознавая взаимозависимость всех явлений культуры.

Все же такая простая оппозиция оказывается недостаточной в контексте современных практик научной деятельности. В настоящей статье в качестве примера приводится описание американским антропологом Полом Рабиноу своего первого исследовательского путешествия за границу: *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco*. Анализ опирается на семиотическую модель общения, которая конструируется путем изучения разных позиций, занимаемых антропологом и его информантами в разных контекстах и ситуациях. Можем выделить четыре главных режима: (1) программирование, которое

основывается на регулярности и предсказуемости поведения действующих лиц; (2) манипуляция, которая основывается на частной договоренности их взаимных отношений; (3) адаптация, которая основывается на взаимном внимании и разных стратегиях, позволяющих обоим партнерам по общению испытать себя; (4) готовность к неожиданностям и непредсказуемости.

Основное достижение нашего анализа состоит в понимании, что каждому прагматическому стилю общения соответствует и модальность на когнитивном уровне. В результате важно подчеркнуть комплексность, если не гетерогенность, стратегий понимания на разных этапах антропологических исследований (начиная с собирания данных до создания новых форм знания).

Рискуя излишним обобщением, можно рассматривать интерактивную методiku, опробованную в настоящей статье на основе матерьяла П. Рабиноу, в качестве метатеоретической модели, описывающей эпистемологические позиции, действующие в социальных науках.

### Teise proovilepanek

Tänapäeva sotsiaalteaduste akadeemilises diskursuses, eriti sellistel erialadel nagu antropoloogia ja semiootika, on tavaks saanud vastandada strukturalistide vana (ja vanamoodsat) metoodikat ning postmodernistide ja poststrukturalistide epistemoloogilisi sõnavõtte. Strukturalism tugineb väidetavalt ideel, et seletades ära teatud kultuuriproducti sisemise ehituse, on võimalik mõista selle tähendust väliselt — ja seega objektiivselt — vaatepunktilt. Vähemalt humanitaarteadused lähenevad tänapäeval kultuuriproductile täiesti vastupidiselt, teadvustades teravalt kõigi productide täielikku vastastikkust sõltuvust.

Siiski osutub taoline lihtsakoeline vastandus hetkel läbiviidava teadustegevuse praktikate kontekstis ebapiisavaks. Käesolevas artiklis tuuakse näiteks ameerika antropoloogi Paul Rabinow kirjeldus tema esimesest uurimisreisist välismaale: *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco*. Analüüs põhineb semiootilisel suhtlusmudelil, mis konstrueeritakse antropoloogi ja tema informantide poolt erinevates kontekstides ja situatsioonides võetud hoiakute uurimisel. Võime eristada nelja peamist režiimi: (1) programmeerimine, mis põhineb tegelaste käitumise regulaarsusel ja etteennustatavusel; (2) manipuleerimine, mis põhineb nende vastastikuste suhete osalisel kokkuleppelisusel; (3) kohandumine, mis tugineb vastastikusel tähelepanelikkusel ja mitmesugustel strateegiatel, mis lubavad

mõlemal suhtluspartneril teineteist proovile panna; (4) valmisolek ootamatuks ja etteennustamatuks.

Käesoleva analüüsi peamine saavutus seisneb arusaamises, et igale pragmaatilisele suhtlusstiilile vastab ka modaalsus kognitiivsel tasandil. Selle tulemusena on oluline rõhutada antropoloogiliste uuringute erinevatel astmetel (alates andmekogumisest kuni uute teadmise vormide loomiseni) esinevate teadmisstrateegiate kompleksust — kui mitte heterogeensust. Riskides liigse üldistamisega, võib käesolevas artiklis P. Rabinow' materjali põhjal läbi katsetatud interaktiivset metoodikat käsitleda kui metateoreetilist mudelit, mis kirjeldab sotsiaalteadustes tervikuna toimivaid epistemoloogilisi hojakuid.



## Eric Wolf: A semiotic exploration of power

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**Abstract.** This paper discusses Eric Wolf's (1923–1999) analysis of power in his last monograph, *Anthropology* (Wolf 1964) and last book *Envisioning Power* (Wolf 1999). In *Anthropology*, Wolf (1964: 96) wrote that the "anthropological point of vantage is that of a world culture, struggling to be born." What is worth studying is human experience in all its variability and complexity. His aim was to set the framework bridging the humanities with anthropology. He never gave up this quest, only expanding it. In the new introduction to his 1964 monograph, thirty years later, he commented that such a synthesis had not occurred. Rather there were growing schisms in the field. In the preface to *Envisioning Power*, he held that human sciences were unable or unwilling to come to grips with how cultural configurations intertwine with considerations of power. In 1990 he had addressed the American Anthropological Society, holding that anthropologists favored a view of culture without power, while other social sciences have advanced a concept of ideology without culture. He wrote that his aim in his last book was to explore the connection of ideas and power observed in streams of behavior and recorded texts. Since minds interpose a selective screen between the organism and environment, ideas have content and functions that help bring people together or divide them. While ideas compose the entire range of mental constructs, Wolf understands ideology as configurations or unified schemes to underwrite or manifest power. Power is, according to Wolf, an aspect of all relations among people. Within this framework Wolf analyzes three cases, the Kwakiutl, the Aztecs, and Nazi Germany. The comparisons are very revealing, both the wide differences and similarities in power configurations and in the role of imagination.

In my first paper about Eric Wolf (1923–1999), entitled “Eric Wolf: the crosser of boundaries” (Portis-Winner 2002a) I wrote that I discerned three streams in Wolf’s thinking. To recapitulate, they were: (1) Wolf the sensitive poet. The exemplar was *Sons of the Shaking Earth*, 1959, which was the focus of my discussion. (2) Wolf the economic and political revolutionary anthropologist who founded peasant studies and abolished forever the notion of the static, ahistorical, unchanging, isolated groups composed of closed structures, whether tribe or peasant village. His own field work extended from Mexico to European peasants, a major topic was peasant history ironically entitled *Europe and the People Without History* (1982). The role of symbolism so fundamental to his early work in *Sons of the Shaking Earth* was not ignored in his later work, note his study of Christmas symbolism entitled “Santa Claus: Notes on a collective representation” (1964). Finally, (3) Wolf the theoretician and philosopher as well as the scientist who grappled with the notion of power and tentatively explored semiotic concepts in this endeavor, which is the subject of this discussion. While all these streams reverberate in all Wolf’s works none were so ambitious as the question of power. In fact what is power? In what way is it a factor in control of others? In what sense does something like power ubiquitously permeate all human societies? Does it have any universal properties and what are its forms? This is the main theme of Wolf’s last monograph, *Envisioning Power*, which I discuss in this article.<sup>1</sup>

This is an exploration barely depicted by anthropologists though particular agents and signs having kinds of power or social control are described in many ethnic studies. It has been left to European philosophers from Nietzsche and onward, to Marx and to French philosophers critiquing culture and society primarily in their contemporary forms, to discuss the universal pertinence of power variously manifested. Anthropologists’ romantic search for utopian equalitarian societies has long been abandoned. But they have not dealt with the issue of power in the broad and comparative sense as has Wolf.

Indeed the response to the ubiquitous and pivotal penchant for transformation and hidden manifestations of power in our era is overwhelmed by the postmodern collapse when such potential universal

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problems are abandoned for subjectivism, reductionism and deconstruction. Or power is reduced and simplified as special cases related to standard categories such as ecology, calories, myths and elements of the relatively static social structure.

By gaining a perspective on this general puzzle I look briefly at two French thinkers, Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault, who may be thought of as philosophers and theoreticians of the grand concepts of power in culture and society. Their concern has been essentially with complex societies but not with specific case histories of whole cultures, although Foucault, for example, has considered modern institutions such as prisons and hospitals.

Turning to Bourdieu, a part of his theory of practice, meaning all symbolic activities, is the concept of "symbolic power [...] based on diverse forms of capital which are not reducible to economic capital" (Bourdieu 1993: 60). This position involves Bourdieu's concept of "cultural field" which is characterized as a "radical conceptualization" which supposes an "analysis of the position of the field with the broader field of power" (Bourdieu 1993: 9). His primary examples are literary, following Jakobson's and Tynjanov's concept of literary system (Bourdieu 1993: 10), although misunderstanding Jakobson's major works, since Bourdieu holds Jakobson's position, not true of his major works, in so far as it remains formalism (Bourdieu 1993: 9). Bourdieu praises Bakhtin, who in thinking of literature, holds it cannot be understood without the social context (Bourdieu 1993: 13). Of course Bakhtin did not limit his examples to literature, omitting social context, for example his famous study of the carnival. Bourdieu notes: "the degree of autonomy of a certain field is measured by its ability to reject external determinants and obey only the specific logic of the field" (Bourdieu 1993). Bourdieu's method "is to incorporate three levels of social reality": (1) the position of any cultural field within the "field of power"; (2) the structure of the field including any relevant agents; and (3) the genesis of the producers' *habitus*, which means the structured dispositions that generate practice (Bourdieu 1993: 1, 14).

I cannot in this short paper discuss Bourdieu and power further except to say that this is not the path of static structuralism or deconstruction and is in fact closer to the semiotics of the Prague school, the Tartu-Moscow school and particularly Lotman and also Bakhtin.

I turn now to Foucault, another French thinker grappling with the issue of power. In a volume edited by Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982) entitled *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, the editors assert that Foucault "is able to explain the logic of structuralism's claim to be an objective science and also the apparent validity of the hermeneutic counter-claim that the human sciences can only legitimately proceed by understanding the deepest meaning of the subject and his tradition" (Dreyfus, Rabinow 1982: xii). According to the editors, his method of interpretive analytics shows how human beings become the sort of "objects and subjects hermeneutics and structuralism discover and analyze" (Dreyfus, Rabinow 1982: xii). For Foucault totalizing is "bio-technical power" meaning ordering of all realms under the guise of improving the welfare of the individual and the population, which is simply a strategy to increase power and order (Dreyfus, Rabinow 1982: xxv). Foucault says he is writing a history of the present. He adopts the term "*dechiffrement*" where social practices have a meaning radically different from that available to the actors, suggesting Lévi-Strauss's disguised meanings.

The final chapter of this book is devoted to Foucault's conception of "Truth and power" (Dreyfus, Rabinow 1982: 184–226), which involves rituals of power and bio-power. Bio-power links the political technologies of the body, the discourses of human sciences and the structure of domination over the last 200 years. Here we note that power is not context free, not ahistorical, not an objective description. Power is not a formal theory. Rather it is a cluster of relations, which are mobile. Power is the operations of the political technologies throughout the social body, through political rituals of power that set up non-egalitarian asymmetrical relations, but power is not restricted to political relations. It is multidirectional and "operating from the top down and from the bottom up" (Dreyfus, Rabinow 1982: 185), and power and institutions are not identical. When these technologies are localized within specific institutions, bio-power takes off. Power is exercised upon the dominant as well as the dominated.

Examples are schools, hospitals and prisons. In sharp remarks concerning power, the editors write that for Foucault, "The spread of normalization operates through the creation of abnormalities which it then must treat and reform. Bio-power is spread under the banner of making people healthy and protecting them. Then if it fails it justifies more of the same" (Dreyfus, Rabinow 1982: 196). A political problem



is recast into the language of science and becomes transformed into a technical problem. For example, bio-power establishes how welfare institutions work and not what they mean or what they do (Dreyfus, Rabinow 1982: 196). Foucault's account of normalizing science is similar to Kuhn's account of how sciences work (Dreyfus, Rabinow 1982: 197). Normalizing technologies preserve an increasingly differentiated set of anomalies and normalizing society becomes a powerful form of domination (Dreyfus, Rabinow 1982: 198).

As the editors tell us, Foucault calls for an interpretive analysis asking why these practices work. Calling on history and knowledge to unveil the truth, means that to understand the cultural practices is to "grapple with the history of the present" (Dreyfus, Rabinow 1982: 204). Foucault explains that he wants to understand the different modes in culture, which transforms people into subjects. The worst diseases of power are fascism and Stalinism. He outlines three types of struggles: (1) against forms of domination, ethnic social and religious; (2) against exploitation; and (3) struggles against forms of subjectivity and submission (Dreyfus, Rabinow 1982: 212). Language is involved in all these forms of power. Systems of communication, that is language as a system of signs may be imbued with power relations. Over and above purely: objective information, language and nonverbal communication implicates power in the following ways: (1) the tying of the message with power that consists of obligatory tasks of all kinds including nonverbal gestures, etc. and (2) finalized activities thus modifying the field of information between partners, producing effects of power (Dreyfus, Rabinow 1982: 218).

Turning to the nature of power, it exists only when it is put into action where actions modify others. "Power and freedom's refusal to submit cannot be separated" (Foucault 1983: 221). "Power relations are rooted deep in the social nexus" (Foucault 1983: 226) and must be analyzed from different perspectives. "A society without power relations can only be an abstraction" (Foucault 1983: 223). This and its forms and objective differentiations are imbued in the social structure, how it is institutionalized etc. "Power relations are rooted in a system of social networks" (Foucault 1983: 222) leading to the conclusion that domination is a central phenomenon in the history of societies, taking universalizing form and locking together power with relations of strategy and the results proceeding from their interaction.



I turn to Eric Wolf's final quest and I stress that he was independent enough to attack the problem of the relation of power and ideas in culture, seeing power as a relational concept that has many possible forms, and is ubiquitous, as was also held by Foucault and Bourdieu, but Wolf added another dimension, that is, to explore and compare how power is grounded in specific culture forms exemplified by three case studies, namely the Kwakiutl, the Aztecs and National Socialist Germany. Thus, the relation of power to specific cultural configurations and ideas and the question of its general qualities constitute his quest.

Before discussing Wolf's last monograph and second to last book, *Envisioning Power: Ideologies of Dominance and Crises* (1999), I look at an earlier publication of Wolf in which his comments are I think emblematic of this scholar. After extensive fieldwork and theoretical excursions into complex societies, he was asked by the Council of the Humanities of Princeton University to contribute a volume on anthropology, which appeared in 1964 (Wolf 1964). In that study he emphasized "anthropology's role in bridging science and the humanities, bringing a multidimensional understanding of what it is to be human: the most scientific of the humanities and the most humanistic of the sciences" (Wolf 2001: 11). He wrote that he hoped that the interdisciplinary character of anthropology would give rise to a new synthesis. However, ten year later when writing a new introduction, he noted that such a synthesis had not occurred (Wolf 2001: 11), and even though in his last monograph he was still searching, he reached some stimulating hypotheses and conclusions which inter-relate power laden ideas, ideology and imaginative worlds, which beg for deeper and more extensive investigation.

The knot that he wants to deconstruct and reconstruct is imaged in the preface of his final monograph where he argued that the humane sciences have "not come to grips with how social relations and cultural configurations intertwine with considerations of power. If anthropologists have favored a view of culture without power, other social analysts have advanced a concept of 'ideology' without culture" (Wolf 1999: ix).

Thus he wanted "to explore the connection between ideas and power" (Wolf 1999: 1). Power not being an abstract theory but a relational term "demands finding out ways to define the relations of power that are played out in social arrangements and cultural

configurations and trace out the possible ways in which these relations of power implicate ideas" (Wolf 1999: 3).

The theoretical aspect of the discussion that follows in certain respects recalls Bourdieu and Foucault, but these writers did not undertake case studies in the anthropological sense in order to examine power in culture, although Foucault considered certain institutions in modern society such as hospitals and prisons, etc. Of course neither were obliged to use the anthropological method but my point is that Wolf alone trod the double path, megatheory and also its applications in its various forms in three very different societies separated in time and space, the cultures of which differed in complexity, their economies ranging from hunting and fishing to cultivators to modern industrialism. Finally Wolf reached out to ask how to apply Peircian semiotics to an underlying fundamental issue which seemed to fall through the cracks of anthropological studies, that is the question of meaning and how meaning is communicated, and how to detect elements of power in modes of communication. Even in Wolf's earliest book, *Sons of the Shaking Earth* (1959) there lurked this quest in the highly metaphoric and mythological study of the history of the Middle American Indians and the rise of the Aztecs.

In our discussion of Wolf's last monograph, I pay particular importance to his basic theme, "Ideas, Power and Communication" as well as the section entitled "Contested Concepts". Like Bourdieu and Foucault, Wolf distanced himself from the simplified view of ideas as mere reflections of the external world. Rather, minds interpose a selective screen between the organism and the environment. Indeed, mental constructions have content and functions. They have an important role in the play of power, resonating with Peirce's signs (the world is profuse with signs). Ideas for Wolf cover the entire range of mental constructs, while ideologies are specific schemes to underwrite power. Wolf's questions are how do ideas become concentrated into ideologies, and how is power understood as an aspect of all group relations?

Wolf (1999: 5) distinguished four ways in which power is woven into social relations: (1) power of potency characterized by a particular individual; (2) the analysis of an ego to impose its will on social action upon an other; (3) tactical or organizational power, where individuals circumscribe the actions of others in tactical or organizational power; (4) structural power, if powerful enough, that

organizes the settings and specifies the direction and distribution of energy flow. Wolf compares this Marxist view of structural power to Foucault's "governance" to meaning "the exercise of 'action upon action'" (Wolf 1999: 5, *cit.* Foucault 1984: 427–428). But while Foucault was referring to structural relations that govern consciousness, Marx was thinking of class economic forces. Essentially I believe Wolf was attempting to combine or relate economic power with power over consciousness.

In a most important discussion, Wolf explores how ideas are a form of communication. He underlines the many modes of meaning that ideas embody. This is a much neglected area in anthropological studies where meanings are often reduced to locations, techniques, and other cognitive formal qualities and overlooked are verbal and nonverbal vehicles that are a part of communication and are potentially polysemic and poly-functional, subjective and metaphoric including ritual dress, culinary codes, codes of appropriate behavior, etc. But they must be decoded, as we know so well from Lévi-Strauss. These codes are not fixed. They vary with social contexts. Yet their dynamics have not been Lévi-Strauss's abiding interest even though they were implied in his depiction of the sad state of particular South American tribes. For Wolf, the dynamic changeability of codes, including the many nuances of meaning over and above the cognitive ones was fundamental — issues not limited by the static map of Saussure. Indeed, how codes are interpreted varies according to the domains they address — such as economic, political and languages, religion, etc. It also varies according to the characteristics of the sender, which involve different accesses to power. Their decoding depends on the choice of interpretants strained through the mind of the receiver. But neither encoding nor decoding are entirely arbitrary since at some level signs maintain some relation to the object signified, as Peirce has held. Thus "power equalities or differentials are at work in defining who can address whom from what symmetrical or asymmetrical positions. The grid formed by these rankings and positions in turn sets up the contexts for how things are said and performed and codifies how they are to be understood" (Wolf 1999: 7). Accordingly there is a tension between adhering to the formal properties of codes and fostering their variability. Wolf stresses the social and public quality of reproducing or modifying codes. While one cannot deny that inventing an isolated language by a single

individual will not be understood, we cannot overlook the aesthetic realm of creativity where object of invented messages may eventually be understood by some sectors.

Returning to the primary issue of power for Wolf, he holds that "ideas [...] are often monopolized by power groups" (Wolf 1999: 7). Wolf criticizes linguistic and semiotics that do not address what the communicative act is about (Wolf 1999: 8) but this could hardly apply to the Prague or Tartu-Moscow school. But it is true that the Saussurian code accounts only for denotative meaning and is thus inadequate. However, Geertz's "Cock Fight" tells in symbolic terms much about the entire culture as does that of Victor Turner's study of the Ndembu and others. Wolf does accept Bourdieu's *habitus* which shows how people "acquire durable and transposable dispositions" conveyed by the institutional landscape of social settings. Such dispositions become symbolic systems that can become instruments of domination (Bourdieu 1992: 115–139; Wolf 1999: 10).

The linkage between ideas and power are the theme of the three case studies, the Kwatkiutl, the Aztecs of the 15th and 16th century, and Germans who peopled the Third Reich (Wolf 1999: 10). In discussing the dialectics and dynamic of language as oppose to Saussure, Wolf turns to Bakhtin who held that signs and their accents vary with social categories such as gender, occupation, status, and different interpretations of traditions. Such multi accentualities could turn communication into an "arena of struggle" (Voloshinov 1986: 23; Wolf 1999: 53).

Wolf is also attracted to Peirce's infinite regression, an open construct that permits the widest kinds of interpretations. For Peirce, the interpretant as well as the sign being interpreted must, as I have noted, have some relation to the object, whether it is by convention, in Peirce's terms symbolic, which some Saussurians call arbitrary, or by indexicality or contiguity with the object whether in the present or displaced by time or space, or by similarity or iconicity. All signs that are fully developed participate in all these levels although one level may dominate another. While Peirce did not consider culture as such, his concept of habits was close to that of culture and his many pithy examples of signs signifying the dynamics of context include the hot stove, where a child would interpret the hot stove differently than the knowing adult, and the Alps that may be interpreted as signs of danger or beauty depending on the perceiver. For Wolf, Peirce's interpretants



all have different priorities and degrees of power (Wolf 1999: 55) which is not inconsistent with the Peircian world of signs.

I must limit myself to a few remarks bearing upon Wolf's case studies. The Kwakiutl story is an epic of transnationalism and imperialism and their ambivalent effects. Wolf sees the story of the Kwakiutl as an outstanding drama, which calls forth the unraveling of the connections of power and ideas, and reveals the effects upon the weaker society. There may be few transnational societies such as the Kwakiutl that utilizes such varied and perfuse symbolic signs in myriad types which bear complex meanings. Wolf writes that the Kwakiutl compose "a salient case explicating particular links between power and ideas" (Wolf 1999: 70). He traces the devastating years of contact and conflict between the Kwakiutl and the British forces, including laws of British Columbia and Canada restricting fishing and hunting reserves and making illegal potlaching and winter dancing in 1888. As we know and as Wolf (1999: 82) describes it, "the socio-politics of rank hierarchy, descent and succession were intertwined with transfers of ceremonial titles and privileges" of marriages and with ritual, their control of rituals, myth, histories and emblematic art, much, has been preserved in memories of the past. Artistic traditions were remembered and found new outlets in markets. In 1951 the potlach was legalized and in 1979 objects once seized were returned and tourist trade was encouraged. Thus the Kwakiutl epic is one of the ambivalence of transnational power and the power of traditional cultural signs. While the Canadian authority remained, the Kwakiutl reenacted primordial myths and ceremonies, in this sense preserving their identity and culture and at the same time participating in the culture of the larger power.

It would not be possible to analyze all the signs prevalent in the so called totem pole and in all aspects of the art and politics and hierarchy and exchange where the giver is more powerful than the receiver, since this requires the full context of the Kwakiutl history, customs and beliefs which Wolf has tried to summarize from the immense literature of this tribe. Thus we must satisfy ourselves with a glimpse here.

The second case is the Aztecs, known for human sacrifice. This society dominated central Mexico from the 15th century until the Spanish conquest in 1521. In asking about the relation between ideas and power, Wolf discusses the relation of Aztec ideology and



structural power. Here he focuses on social relations between producers of tribute and receivers of tribute (Wolf 1999: 124). The Aztecs, or more correctly the Tenochea, were a part of the Toltec domain which disintegrated after 1000. This group adopted a Toltec solar cult and sacrifice by heart incision (Wolf 1999: 137). As Tenochea gained power they claimed to be the Chosen People of the god Huitzilopochtli "who destined them for universal dominance" (Wolf 1999: 135). They became successful warriors. They believed that they should maintain the cosmos and they appropriated land labor and tribute from those they defeated (Wolf 1999: 141). They built temples and constructed a new society and calendar. Nobles wore special clothing, headdresses and ornaments. The chief ruler was in charge of the military and warriors were charged with the task of bringing back enemies to be sacrificed, which were associated with public rituals.

The cosmology and beliefs of the Aztec are too complex to be summarized here. Syncretic forms, Spanish and indigenous traditions, were intertwined. The Spanish destroyed the great temple, Tenochtitlan, all sacred texts and executed many of the priests. But memories of the past persisted, performances and festivals continued. And encouraged by the Mexican revolution of 1910, a florescence of the plastic and performative arts and "elements and themes drawn from was long thought of as a dead culture signal a live presence under new circumstances" (Wolf 1999: 195).

The third and final case is National Socialist Germany. The Third Reich lasted twelve years after its birth in 1937. To attempt to understand power and ideas in this case is more than ambitious. In close to 100 pages, Wolf attempts such an analysis (Wolf 1999: 197–273) and I can only choose some high points here. Wolf sees an analogy of German National Socialism to cargo cults and ghost dances, although it is not like other revitalistic movements since it links vitality to apocalyptic visions of racial corruption (Wolf 1999: 198). While we cannot fully explain this movement, Wolf asks us to try. And he refers to various attempts that he believes are not mutually exclusive. Wolf is partial to the concept of "*Sonderweg*", which stresses the historical peculiarities of the development of the Germanies (Wolf 1999: 199). As a distinctive trajectory of German history (Wolf 1999: 198–199) reaching back to the 30 years war that ended in 1648 and earlier, demonstrate how ancient were the traditions that were

mixed with populism, mass party organizations, capitalism etc. (Wolf 1999: 201).

Prussia became powerful after the 30 years war, and was the pivot of German unification. Thus after the defeat of France, Germans became strikingly more nationalistic and the German federation of loosely knit states became a movement towards self-cultivation, as opposed to nation building in France. The middle classes stressed training in the values of German *Burgertum* (pride of middle classes). Germans distinguished the *Volks* as part of nature as opposed to political and intellectual nations (Wolf 1999: 211). The dream was of a *Reich* Empire based on popular myths...

Prussia became stronger after the Treaty of Vienna (1915) when it was awarded new territory in West Germany and militarism was dominant. The defeat in WWI created greater hostility and deprivation. *Volk* and *Geist* were projected by the National Socialists to racial health, meaning eliminating undesirables: Jews, gypsies, misfits, etc.

Wolf concludes that National Socialism has not disappeared from the world. He writes that he finds it in new forms, in cries for regional autonomy and ethnic separatism. In the face of international finance and commerce and corporations, public policy is being challenged by demands for privatization including means of violence acquired by armed entrepreneurs linked up with mafia types.

The above can only be a sample of some of the main points of Wolf. The treatment of all these cases would require several lengthy articles and the German case would need still more.

This study concludes with a Coda (Wolf 1999: 274–291). While it summarizes and compares three cases, Wolf says they are incommensurate. He analyzes the kind of structural power that organizes each society but he brilliantly interweaves the role of imaginary worlds with his concept of power, and here on an abstract level these societies are commensurable. He unites the many different segmented approaches to culture and power with an overriding concept, that of imagination.

The following discussion from the Coda and my comments expands on the above conclusion. The three case studies were societies under maximum stress. In each case they developed an ideology fashioned out of preexisting cultural materials but power permeated the new agenda. Specifically, power organized and structured social labor “rooted in the nature of the cosmos” (Wolf 1999: 274). In

Wolf's words "Old ideas were rephrased to fit different circumstances and new ideas were presented as age-old truths [...] [which] were resolved through the exercise of power" (Wolf 1999: 275).

The Kwakiutl society was stressed by contact with the modern powerful peoples who leveled various restrictions on the Kwakiutl and altered the economy. The Tenocha went from a local band to control of a regional empire. National Socialist Germany was preceded by a sudden unification, introduction of industrialism and dominance of a militaristic Prussia. And the loss of WWII ended National Socialist attempt at world conquest.

Turning to the cosmology of these three societies, they had in common that they sanctioned and underwrote the power of the elite. Kwakiutl cosmological rationale provided that chiefs reenact animal ancestors and hold special privileges. That required a redistribution which transferred vital powers to guests. Chiefs were initiated giving them the control of life and death issues between spirits and the living (Wolf 1999: 276). The advancing capitalism increased sources of wealth and epidemics, diminished the population including chiefly heirs, which led to an inflationary competition for privileges including the newly rich (Wolf 1999: 270).

The Tenocha economy was based on tribute paid by commoners to hereditary chiefs. Toward the end of the 15th century a military faction took over and revived mythological history supported by monumental art. The rulers considered that they had special power from the god of conquest and plunder and were responsible for sustaining time and the sun and offering human sacrifice to feed an ideology of world renewal.

In the first two cases discussed, the rulers had a special relation to plants and animals, and depended on rhetorical skills by which they projected the imagined worlds in which power holders had strategic power (Wolf 1999: 278).

Also in the case of National Socialist Germany, Wolf finds some analogies on the abstract level of power intertwined with cosmologies and imagined worlds. When Germany was dominated by the Prussians, the call was for a unified *Volk* which was further underwritten by the defeat in WWI. National Socialist ideology called for the rearmament of the national will and for building a war machine. While the Tenocha and the Kwakiutl saw human groups and plants and animals in constant struggle, the National Socialists devised

the conception that human races had distinct origins, and history became a struggle in nature for the predominance of the superior Aryan race (Wolf 1999: 279). Ideological rhetoric extolled what we today call ethnic cleansing.

As from the point of view of history, and socio-economic type, these three societies are incommensurable, as I have noted, but in all three cases power depended on cosmological imperatives not limited to organizing society, but depending also "on relationships with imaginary elements and beings projected beyond tangible experience into metaphysical worlds" (Wolf 1999: 281).

Wolf calls our attention to the limitations of models of anthropologists explaining ideas and culture as for example functionalism, ecological factors, and structural and binary oppositions rooted in the biophysics of the mind. Helpful as these explanations are, the equally important area is what all this activity is about. What is the content of these practices?

Wolf is aware of Benveniste's (1971) insistence on the semantics of the sentence and the referent and thus context, for which he thought semiotics accounted (Wolf 1999: 282). But here something important is lacking since the Prague School's rebellion against Saussure was promulgated in the Theses of 1929. Accordingly the authors laid the basis for Prague school semiotics, which was led particularly by Mukařovsky, and was then taken up by the Tartu-Moscow school, particularly by Lotman who pioneered semiotics of culture.

When Wolf asks to what cultural signs point, or entail, what world is envisaged, who is setting up the valuation and for whom, and when he notes that some of the referents may be imaginary and many human beings and objects etc. may be ascribed imaginary power, here Wolf is in fact calling for a semiotics of culture (Wolf 1999: 282), a whole domain barely touched by American anthropologists. Wolf states: "the ideology of these three cases envision and project such imaginary worlds" (Wolf 1999: 283). Thus "the Kwakiutl assigned transhuman values to certain kinds of objects and made their distribution and exchange a major theme of their lives" (Wolf 1999: 283). The Tenocha imagined that the gods gave them life and had to be repaid by war and sacrifice. The National Socialists thought they were carrying out the law of nature to preserve the Aryan race and destroy inferior types, and particularly the Jews.



The persistence of sacred propositions, Wolf explains, is the power of ascribing to them transhuman forces giving their spokesmen "a special aura of authority and enhancing the efficacy of their words and ritual performance" (Wolf 1999: 285). Here Wolf suggests the pertinence of Austin's "perlocutionary" or "performative" speech acts producing perlocutionary performative truths (Wolf 1999: 285).

Wolf comments on the limitation of those who oppose enlightenment universal rational truths to the organic and spiritual whole culture, that is the invoking of ancient customs and folklore and tradition. Wolf argues for preserving the notion of culture in spite of all these conflicting views and ambiguities since culture accounts for human practices and discourses "covered neither by progressive universalism or by retrograde parochialism" (Wolf 1999: 287). As he argues, the human ability to construct figments in our mind, to think of metaphors and metonyms, is still not understood. Nor do we know how culture connects with power. Wolf advances the notion of structural power and its relation to ideology and imagination. He believes that the human capacity to envision imaginary worlds is beginning to elicit more interest as is also the question of how culture and power connect (Wolf 1999: 291).

I conclude with a message from Peirce with which Wolf's ideas interestingly resonate. As Peirce holds, the world is perfused with signs and all signs have three levels, one of which will be dominant, namely iconic, indexical and symbolic. Wolf has called our attention to the importance of Peirce's interpretant, which accounts for the infinite process of semiosis. The interpretant is not fixed but depends on the interpreter and thus the element of power communicated by the sign is variable. Like Jakobson's invisible oil that changes all the relationships of the ingredients of the salad, power is ubiquitous and transposing and thus is hard to be dealt with satisfactorily. Signs are what Jakobson called 'context sensitive' and their meanings will change depending on context, history, and the mindset of the senders and receivers. Their subliminal and disguised aspects are ever-present forces, but since forms of power are typically clothed and disguised in *clichés*, myths or what has been called double speak, such paradigms may be hard to detect, which helps to account for their frequent neglect. For power is embedded in signs, which must be interpreted.

Peirce's comments about imagination, although in this case referring to literature, are pertinent to Wolf's perception. He defines



the real as "that whose characters are independent of what anybody may think" (CP 5.405), whereas the fictive [Peirce sometimes uses the term 'figment' instead of fiction] is the opposite of reality, namely

the product of somebody's imagination; it has such characters as his thought impresses upon it [...] [and is] independent of how you or I think [...] There are, however, phenomena within our own minds, dependent upon our thought, which are at the same time real in the sense that we really think them. But though their characters depend on how we think, they do not depend on what we think those characters to be. (CP 5.405)

I conclude that relevance is not the only criterion for important studies but in this case surely Wolf's power and imagination and ideology and Peirce's fictive worlds are important and relevant.

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### Эрик Вольф: семиотическое изучение власти

Рассматривается анализ власти в последней книге Эрика Вольфа *Envisioning Power* (1999). В своей короткой книге под названием «Антропология» Вольф пишет, что «антропологическая исходная точка — это постоянно образующаяся мировая культура». Т.е. нужно изучать людской опыт во всей ее изменчивости и сложности. Его целью была создать обрамление, соединяющее гуманитарные науки и антропологию. Свой проект он не закончил, а только расширял. В новом введении к его книге 1964 года, 30 лет спустя, он пришел к выводу, что ожидаемый синтез не состоялся, а скорее наоборот — выросли новые преграды. В предисловии к *Envisioning Power* он полагает, что гуманитарные науки были неспособны или не имели желания принять к сведению тот факт, что культурные конфигурации тесно переплетены с силами власти. В 1990 году он написал Американскому антропологическому обществу, что антропологи предпочитают рассматривать культуру безотносительно к власти, в то время как другие социальные науки выдвигают понятие идеологии без культуры. Он написал, что цель его последней книги — разъяснить связь идей и власти, основываясь на поведении и записанных текстах. В то время как разум выдвигает разделяющий экран между организмом и его окружением, идеи имеют содержание и функции, помогающие объединять или разделять людей. Несмотря на то, что идеи составляют суть ментальных конструкций, Вольф понимает идеологию как конфигурацию унифицированных схем, обеспечивающих или манифестирующих власть. Власть есть по Вольфу аспект всех межчеловеческих взаимоотношений. Внутри такого теоретического обрамления Вольф изучает 3 разных случая: Kwakiutl, ацтеков и нацистской Германии. Сравнения хорошо показывают как различия так и сходство в конфигурациях власти и в роли воображения.

### Eric Wolf: semiootiline uurimus võimust

Vaatluse all on võimu analüüs Eric Wolfi viimases monograafias *Envisioning Power* (1999). Oma lühiteoses pealkirjaga "Antropoloogia" kirjutab Wolf, et "antropoloogia vaateplatvormiks on hetkel sündimasolev maailmakultuur" (1964: 96). Oluliseks uurimisobjektiks on just inimkogemus kogu tema mitmekesisuses ja muutlikkuses. Wolfi eesmärgiks oli luua humanitaarteaduseid ja antropoloogiat ühendav raamistik. Seda püüdlust ei hüljanud ta kunagi, vaid arendas pidevalt edasi. Oma uues sissejuhatuses 1964. aastal kirjutatud raamatule 30 aastat hiljem jõuab ta järeldusele, et oodatud süntees ei leidnud aset, vaid hoopis vastupidi — ühinemise teele kasvasid uued tõkked. Eessõnas raamatule *Envisioning Power* väidab ta, et humanitaarteadused ei ole olnud võimelised või siis ei ole soovinud mõista seda, kuidas kultuurilised konfiguratsioonid põimuvad võimukaalutlustega. 1990. aastal pidas Wolf Ameerika Antropoloogia Seltsis kõne, milles väitis, et antropoloogid eelistavad vaadelda kultuuri võimust eraldi, samal ajal kui teised sotsiaalteadused tõstavad kilbile kultuurist lahutatud ideoloogia mõiste. Ta kirjutas, et tema viimase raamatu eesmärgiks on selgitada ideede ja võimu vahelisi seoseid, tuginedes käitumispraktikatele ja kirjalikele tekstidele. Kuna mõistus tekitab organismi ja teda ümbritseva keskkonna vahele eraldusloori, on ideedel sisu ja funktsioonid, mis aitavad inimesi lahutada või ühte siduda. Kui ideed on Wolfi jaoks mentaalsete konstruktsioonide põhisisuks, siis ideoloogiat mõistab Wolf kui võimu toimimiseks või näitamiseks vajalikke malle või ühtlustatud skeeme. Võim on Wolfi järgi kõikide inimestevaheliste suhete üks aspekt. Taolise teoreetilise raamistiku sees vaatleb Wolf kolme erinevat juhtumit: kwakiutlid, asteegid ja natslik Saksamaa. Võrdluses on hästi näha nii sarnasus kui erinevus võimu konfiguratsioonides ja ettekujutuse rollis.

## Just a foreword? Malinowski, Geertz and the anthropologist as native

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**Abstract.** Read through semiotic analysis, the narrative intrigue of (the *evenemential and cognitive dimension* of) the anthropologist's work reveals the *epistemological configuration* encasing some central and interrelated questions in anthropology: the communication-interaction between anthropologists and other inter-actants, their invention-application of some meta-languages and the subsequent intercultural translations of concepts and processes. To explore this configuration, I compare a foreword written by Malinowski and another one written by Geertz. In these forewords, they resort to refined stories to frame complex argumentations. In Malinowski's foreword, two superposing stories are told: (1) a tale of a subject's *performance* newly endowed with professional *competences* (the ethnologist) and a discipline possessing a more modern and positive knowledge (Functionalist ethnology) and (2) a symmetric tale of exchanged messages (with relative *sanction* and *counter-sanction*) between an enunciator (who has to lay the foundations of this science) and an addressee (who has to confirm the validity of messages). To lay these foundations, the enunciator implicitly proposes an epistemology based on some values (such as 'penetration', 'progression', and the 'overcoming of limits') privileging the metaphor of space and the *cumulative aspect* of process. As far as Geertz's foreword is concerned, the enunciator has recourse to two different stories: (1) one concerning the interaction between Geertz and his editor (rather than with natives) to justify his hermeneutic position and (2) another one, larger and including, concerning the reversal of causality relationships to reaffirm the value of coincidence. If in Malinowski's foreword, stories are used to redefine some programmatic principles ('discontinuity' and the combination of 'three different oxymora') through which ethnology can be given a scientific nature and a new foundation, in Geertz's foreword, on the contrary, value is given to 'coincidence' and 'writing' in its multiple forms and (paradoxically, for an interpretativist) a binary discursive epistemology and a style of thought privileging the *non-terminative* and *imperfective* process have been combined.

Even if a beginning is the inevitable start of a positive project, I would like to begin by affirming a negation and by weakening a *programmation*. This text is not the exact transcription of the conference that I presented at the congress on Anthropology and Semiotics that took place last year in Tartu (whose proceedings can be found in this volume). The original title of my communication was *Towards a Semiotics of Anthropology and Anthropology of Semiotics*. I had to cut parts off my original communication because of more limited space granted for written texts. The risk was to undermine the value of the chaotic flux of the fortuitous *coincidence* and to lose the fresh and necessary taste of what was said during the oral communication. I eliminated a part of the communication that concerned the anthropology of semiotics and I decided to concentrate on the semiotics of anthropology. This *necessity*, motivated here by *practical reasons*, is a theoretical and unavoidable component of any anthropological project and deserves a thorough examination. This necessity passes, in my individual project, as a reflecting reverberation concerning the impossibility to recover the whole *process* (the enunciation in its effective unfolding and the practice in its development) and the possibility to eliminate, at will but without damage, some elements of the *organization of the message* to be conveyed (the superfluous remainders of the utterance and the redundant constituents of the abstract meta-language).

Can anthropology of semiotics be considered, in its complex whole, a superfluous remainder? I would not say so. I would rather say it is a necessary *reference* inside other referring elements whose series create a *grid* of meaning, a mythical ground upon which one can situate a transitory origin of impalpable relationships existing between subjects and objects. By creating multiple references (and by implanting grids), one can hope to better focus on an (apparent transparent) *object* to study and on the (apparent public) meanings assembled by private *subject* carrying out researches. By combining references and grids, one can disarm the traps of transparency and the illusions of 'pre-shared-once-for-all' meanings.

Lévi-Strauss had already had the insight that references and grids were the base of the constitution of myth and even founded the



meaning of life<sup>1</sup>. Following his example concerning myth and life (as well as the principle of *constitution* and *foundation* of a scientific elaboration), I reserve the right to start here a reflection on the semiotics of anthropology and to refer in the future to the anthropology of semiotics. I am, as a consequence, in the *passive position* of someone who concentrates on the semiotics of anthropology as if it was a central element, but who does not either forget that, at the same time, the *act of relegating* in the periphery (the anthropology of semiotics, in this specific case) is only occasional and it is not tantamount to the recognition of a substantial Otherness or an ultimate meaning. It is a question of balancing Self and Otherness: 'keeping oneself' on the *threshold*, 'running after' a *reference* and 'holding back' on the structuring of an unfolding *grid*. The programming and the random intervention, the necessity and the coincidence, the part and the whole, the enunciation and the utterance, the theories and the practices, the subjective investment and the transparent objectivity, the reference and the grid are some categories that inescapably cross one another and intermingle in the (re)presentation of a past event (including oral communication).

Most of the work of an anthropologist is situated on the brink between a 'past event' and the 'event to represent', between a 'message to convey' and the 'fleeting enunciation to recover'. That is why he cannot help thinking as a linguist and a semiotician or improvising himself as a philosopher of daily life driving off those abstractions that introduce themselves, furtively and restlessly, in the grain of experience to be converted into texts. An anthropologist does his work, implying himself thoroughly and using his personal experience, to obtain a more general and systematic knowledge on Man and a more specific and concrete knowledge on men. Independently from

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<sup>1</sup> "Dans tout ce que j'ai écrit sur la mythologie, j'ai voulu montrer qu'on n'arrive jamais à un sens dernier. Y arrive-t-on d'ailleurs dans la vie? La signification que peut offrir un mythe pour moi, pour ceux qui le racontent ou l'écoutent à tel ou tel moment et dans des circonstances déterminées, n'existe que par rapport à d'autres significations que le mythe peut offrir pour d'autres narrateurs ou auditeurs, dans d'autres circonstances et à un autre moment. Un mythe propose une grille, définissable seulement par ses règles de construction. Cette grille permet de déchiffrer un sens, non du mythe lui-même mais de tout le reste: images du monde, de la société, de l'histoire, tapies au seuil de la conscience, avec les interrogations que les hommes se posent à leur sujet" (Lévi-Strauss 1988: 197).

his effective declinations of the discipline (for example, a preference for abstraction or for concreteness), his belonging to a precise school of thought or a more autonomous approach, the recourse to experience remains constant and indispensable.

Nevertheless, any experience becomes an accessory component (somewhat elusive) if it is not rendered through its codification and communication. Even though the recourse to experience is inevitable, an anthropologist could not produce the 'results' of his research without a text that concentrates (and at the same time eliminates) part of the situations and interactions that he had directly on location. Any experience has to be converted in *ordered semiosis* and has to be supported by a comprehensible text for a receiver. Similarly, a conference given in a specific context, with a real audience, in conditions of effective interaction, has to be 'adapted' for a larger audience, following modalities that belong, for example, to the written language (which codifies experience in its own terms). Experience cannot be conveyed as such, and neither would be useful if it were possible: 'to take shape', experience needs a supplementary and founding passage consisting in the 'constitution' of a discursive order (Foucault 1971).

In my opinion, the opposition characterising the anthropologist's work, caught between the poles of experience and the order of narration to his readers (and to himself), is, more generally, a founding principle in anthropology that cannot be solved in one sense or another. It is because this opposition is conflicting and unsolved that the anthropologist's work is an interesting object of study. All the more so since this function established between experience and narration is amplified by the implicit role of translator fulfilled by an anthropologist: he translates processes and conceptualisations connected to experience into narrations for an 'arrival audience' often different, by language and culture, from the 'source audience' (Montes 2000–2001). In this perspective, it doesn't sound excessive to stress the syncretism of the roles by saying that an anthropologist is also, even if unconsciously, a semiotician who passes from one code to another, from an oral language to the written one, from a concrete situation to the metalinguistic formalization, from a context to the text, from a cultural semiosphere to another.

I spoke of an 'anthropologist' (and not of 'anthropology') for a concrete reason. An anthropologist is a man (or a woman) who thinks and acts, suffers and has emotions as any other human being.

Anthropology is on the contrary a discipline that (as most disciplines) tends to abstract the concrete dimension connected to experience and tends to produce "un principe de contrôle de la production du discours" (Foucault 1971: 37). In my contribution, I will neglect anthropology as a generalized knowledge and I will take into account the production of the anthropologist's discourse starting from his individual 'saying' and 'doing': that is a scholar, with a specific competence and background, but also a subject, similar to anyone else, who goes through an exceptional experience such as the ethnographic research.

It is true that an anthropologist cannot escape the principles that, in one period or another of history, dominate in a culture and are transformed into a stereotyped and generalized knowledge. This affirmation, however, more than a real objection is a solid reason to concentrate on single anthropologists and on their specific usage of discursive forms, on their textual representation of the context, on the most adapted metalanguage chosen to investigate Otherness in ethnographies (Montes 2005a). I prefer, therefore, to focus on some anthropologists rather than on anthropology because in this way one can better take into account the specific *evenemential* and *cognitive dimensions* of their discourses (Greimas 1983). As we shall see later, the detailed analysis of *evenemential* and *cognitive dimensions* is essential to understand the general configuration of the anthropologists' knowledge as a *plot* of thought, action and emotion.

There is also another reason which justifies my semiotic perspective. If we cannot deny that an anthropologist is an 'author' (Geertz 1988) or, better, the crystallisation of an author-function (Foucault 1994 [1969]), then neither can we neglect that an anthropologist is also a native. In my contribution, I will try to show that an anthropologist is also a native, a member of his own culture in constant balance between intercultural 'objectivations and dialogisms' (Miceli 1990). An anthropologist is an individual born in an exact place, who has learned one or more languages, follows specific customs, respects some laws and refuses others, someone with habits and manners typical of the culture he belongs to. The consequence is that an anthropologist's viewpoint on some cultures usually reveals important features characterizing these cultures but it also reflects his cultural origin and belonging. What I propose here, even if in a short and experimental form, is to study anthropologists as natives: that is

members of their own culture who cannot help being centred on their culture and, in the meantime, who try to integrate themselves into the culture they are studying.

Following Foucault (who, nevertheless, concentrated more on the notion of author), one can presuppose that an anthropologist's belonging (his 'being native') constitutes, in an archaeological dimension of knowledge, a real and true function that I will call 'native-function'. In the history of anthropology, the features representing an anthropologist as a native (with his cultural belonging and individual predisposition) are often omitted, and with it are occasionally cancelled those unsolvable (and necessary) oppositions that, more generally, characterize anthropology: the combination of experience and narration, the tension between individual research and the whole definition of a culture, the relationship between processes and structures, the objectifying work and the subjective investment. I think, more particularly, that an anthropologist's research is effectively marked by a semantic figure: the oxymoron.

The multiple paths of realisation, neutralization or cancellation of conflicting categories, in the form of a cognitive and evenemential *intrigue* taken into account by an anthropologist, specify the approaches and orientation of different schools in anthropology. Since I cannot explore the cognitive and evenemential dimensions (contained in thick ethnographies) that would reveal the singular usages of these features, I will resort to a shortcut that is in itself a neglected itinerary in semiotics and in anthropology: the analyses of forewords<sup>2</sup>. My choice is therefore intentionally restricted to two texts written by two famous anthropologists: Bronislaw Malinowski and Clifford Geertz. If it is true that these anthropologists are internationally known and that references to their ethnographies are countless, it is also true that their forewords have never been analysed comparatively to show the metadiscursive nature of their reflection and their epistemological positioning (sometimes implicit) contained in very short texts.

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<sup>2</sup> For practical reasons, I restrain here the analysis to texts without taking into account the subsequent discourse of anthropologists and informants on their own ethnographies and forewords. An anthropology of anthropology questioning itself on the connections between 'what has already happened' and the 'reflection *a posteriori*' of anthropologists on their work is a research that should become an integral part of a larger program centred on the exploration of the native-function.



Perhaps, one might wonder why a semiotician should focus on short forewords rather than choosing to analyse the general thought and practice of anthropologists. The motivation is deeply rooted in a semiotic posture: forewords are a concentrate of key concepts and these concepts are situated in these texts that are, as a matter of fact, a real and true genre (Taverna 2006). Analysing a foreword means to study a textual genre and, in parallel, (as stressed by Greimas in his article on the foreword by Dumézil) what the author "lui-même pense de son discours, de sa finalité et de son organisation" (Greimas 1983: 174). This theoretical attitude is based on the postulate that concepts and texts are tightly connected and that the textual genre contributes to assign a specific meaning to concepts (Montes 2005b). I start, therefore, by analysing the foreword written by Malinowski (1922a [1921]) to pass later on to the foreword written by Geertz (2000).

Malinowski's text (1922b) is generally considered a founding text in anthropology and, in the meantime, an essential reference for the Functionalist school. Any discipline tries to give itself an origin and a foundation, both 'situated' in some texts considered as classical texts, references for future scholars. Commonly, Malinowski's text is considered a founding text because it marks, conceptually, the passage from the Evolutionist school to the Functionalist school (with the affirmation of participant observation as a distinctive practice). In my perspective, this text by Malinowski is founding because the passage from one school to another is engraved into the text by some narrative and rhetorical strategies that build a *simulacrum* of a reader, inside the text, whose duty consists in producing a recognition and a *sanction* on the 'doing' and 'saying' of the enunciator. In other words, this passage from one school to another becomes a value to communicate that the text conveys by means of refined and complex procedures constructing an idea of 'foundation'.

As we shall see, in the foreword by Malinowski the sanction is emitted as a narrative element already acquired, taken for granted by the implied reader whose role consists in crediting (1) ethnology as a positive and scientific knowledge, in confirming the discontinuity existing (2) between the professional ethnologist and the "amateur's work" and (3) between the Evolutionist school and the Functionalist school. Upon these elements ('crediting with a value' and 'situating a discontinuity'), the enunciator builds a different ethnology, a discip-



line with a scientific knowledge that possesses a 'foundation' and an 'origin'.

In the incipit a 'foundation' is created through the ostentation of a *program of research* that should be accomplished rapidly (before the natives disappear) and by defining the figure of the anthropologist as a solitary hero. The program of research and the subject (competent to realise it) are two features tightly connected, already in the incipit, to questions equally central according to Malinowski: the scientific foundation of ethnology and the difficulty emanating from the disappearance of its object of study. Malinowski maintains that:

Ethnology is in the sadly ludicrous, not to say tragic, position, that at the very moment when it begins to put its workshop in order, to forge its proper tools, to start ready for work on its appointed task, the material of its study melts away with hopeless rapidity. Just now, when the methods and aims of scientific field ethnology have taken shape, when men fully trained for the work have begun to travel into savage countries and study their inhabitants – these die away under our eyes. (Malinowski 1922a: xv)

Malinowski's discourse revolves around the scientific foundation of a kind of ethnology which is seen, in this fragment, as a discipline already possessing the instruments to accomplish its specific mission: studying the savages of faraway countries. The object to study is considered as "material": the natives are not real and true persons with whom to construct some kind of knowledge, but 'motionless individuals' to observe through the lens of ethnology. The figure of the anthropologist, paradoxically, seems to be absorbed by the discipline and its programmatic knowledge. This is justified by the fact that, in a scientific perspective (the one defended by Malinowski), it is not uniquely the value of a single ethnologist to count, with his subjective insights and discoveries, but also the method of the discipline.

In this way, by opening his foreword with this incipit, the enunciator represents ethnology as a science possessing objective and transparent features. The only trace of the ethnologist's presence is revealed, in this incipit, by the syntagm "under our eyes". As a counterpart to the absent figure of the ethnologist, we can find an almost lifeless object to study, "material" for observation, represented by the lexeme "inhabitants". Rather than people to interact with, the inhabitants are considered objects to observe. They are represented as something solid (that could melt), as something material possessing a

form and a consistency. Even the method of ethnology "take(s) shape" (becoming solid) and the inhabitants "die under our eyes" (liquefying as objects). In other terms, Malinowski's discourse turns around an idea of solidity and presence (owned by the discipline and by the object to observe), while the ethnologist takes on the features of a *collective actant* and the natives vanish as interacting subjects. In this short incipit, are therefore outlined, through different modalities, three key figures: the (1) ethnologist, the (2) inhabitants and (3) ethnology. If (1) ethnologists are "men fully trained for the work", the (2) Others are "inhabitants" of "savage countries" and (3) ethnology is represented as a discipline with a positive and a well defined knowledge.

On one hand, we see a discipline that has already a constitution, with a "workshop", its "tools" and its "task" and on the other hand we see material (the natives) represented in terms of solidity and presence. The only difficulty perceived by Malinowski is the 'foreseen' disappearance of the native: the material to observe. It is important here to insist on the meaning of the lexeme 'material': something that one can manipulate and examine without a lively resistance. It is a circumscribed and motionless object that doesn't escape the observation of a subject and that demands reduced forms of interactions.

From the linguistic viewpoint, the rapidity of the ethnologist's action and the responsibility with which he is charged are urged in two ways: thanks to the (1) redundancy of the adverbial locutions ("at the very moment when"; "Just now, when") and to (2) the coincidence created between the *inchoative aspect* of the discipline which is ready to face scientifically his duty (ethnology that "begins" and is ready "to start") and the *terminative aspect* of the object of study which disappears. Time is therefore conceived as the ethnologist's time: someone who has to hurry up to do his work before the definitive 'death' of the natives.

The insufficient time and the material nature of the object are tightly connected through the *isotopy* of the 'solidity' and 'visible' that characterises the incipit. Malinowski's usage of some metaphors strengthens this isotopy spread all over the foreword: see for example, "the material of its study melts away"; "these die away under our eyes". Obviously, the semantic features selected for a 'discourse of foundation' can be multiple. In this specific case, the enunciator accentuates the passage from a previous phase to the following one

and emphasizes the figure of a rival, an anti-actant to be discredited: the amateur. Malinowski writes:

The research which has been done on native races by men of academic trainings has proved beyond doubt and cavil that scientific, methodic inquiry can give us results far more abundant and of better quality than those of even the best amateur's work. Most, though not all, of the modern scientific accounts have opened up quite new and unexpected aspects of tribal life. They have given us, in clear outline, the picture of social institutions often surprisingly vast and complex; they have brought before us the vision of the native as he is, in his religious and magical beliefs and practices. (Malinowski 1922a: xv)

The "amateur" fulfills at least two critical roles: he is somebody who lacks the necessary competence to do fieldwork and he is also an *anti-actant* through which one can see, by a negative comparison, what is the real duty of an ethnologist endowed with "academic trainings" and willing to do a "methodic inquiry". If, in the incipit, the accent is laid on ethnology in itself (and on the potential *manque* produced by the rapid disappearance of the material to study), in this fragment the enunciator focuses more specifically on a new figure of ethnologist who is defined in (1) positive terms and by using a (2) negative comparison: (1) positively, by the syntagm "men of academic trainings" and by the attribution of "results far more abundant and of better quality than those of even the best amateur's work"; (2) negatively, through the discredit of the *anti-actant* (the amateur) who summarizes a *performance* and a *competence* to refuse because (for the enunciator) they are already overcome by modern science.

As we have seen, in order to construct a scientific knowledge Malinowski maintains that there are two moments in the history of the discipline: the first one marked by the amateur's work (those who improvised themselves as ethnologists) and the second one, scientific and modern, dominated by the 'real' ethnologist with a program of research based on some essential elements (for example, method and academic trainings) that characterise his *competence* and define his *performance* (with a triple *object of value* such as "aspects of tribal life", "the picture of social institutions" and "the vision of the native as he is").

By affirming the existence of different periods (and the passage from the first one to the second one), the enunciator obtains a double effect. The enunciator builds a *simulacrum* of a reader who can

positively describe the new figure of ethnologist (belonging to the present and to science) to the detriment of the amateurs (belonging to the past and non-science). In the meantime, the enunciator can imply that also all the others who did research before the Functionalists are overcome and did not produce real science. This rhetorical strategy is therefore effective to advance an implicit meaning that could have not been expressed manifestly by Malinowski: the polemics with the Evolutionists. Stressing a difference between what is old and overcome (the amateur) and what is new and modern (the new figure of ethnologist) has also the function to sanction positively a kind of ethnologist (Functionalist) to the detriment of others (for example, the Evolutionists).

Furthermore, if in this fragment the ethnologist's program is more precisely defined, then also the *isotopy* of the object to be studied as material and seized by observation is also strengthened. In fact, for the ethnologist the "social institutions" become a "picture" and the native becomes a "vision" that is "before us" (the ethnologists). In sum, in this fragment we can find a whole story with a *subject* charged to act (the ethnologist), an *explicit anti-actant* (the amateur), an *implicit anti-actant* (the Evolutionist), a triple *object of value* ("tribal life", "social institutions" and "the native") and a *helper-instrument* (the observation).

The tight association between the rhetorical and the narrative strategy helps avoiding an open polemics with the Evolutionists and, more specifically, is effective to convey furtively two fundamental narrative segments: the *competence* and the *sanction*. The *competence* of the subject charged to act (the ethnologist) is seen as if it was the only and exclusive kind of scientific knowledge; the *sanction* is built as if it was taken for granted, that is a sanction not to verify ("the research [...] has proved beyond doubt and cavil [...]"; "They have given us, in clear outline, the picture of social institutions"). The positive (and anticipated) sanction is the result of a strategy used to obtain (1) the recognition from the reader and (2) the manifest acquisition of two features conferring scientific and natural value: 'clearness' and 'visibility'.

If the role of observation is confirmed both in the incipit and in this passage, what is modified is here the meaning of the object to study. If the object ("the native") was considered as 'material to observe', in this passage the "native" becomes above all (and somehow implicitly)



a goal to reach through observation. In other terms, it is here implied that the clearness obtained following research and the greater visibility of material correspond to an increment of knowledge. In this way, the enunciator communicates the presupposition that the goal of science does not only consist in the application of the look to material that is "under our eyes", but also in the capacity to make clearer (always through observation), more visible and more objective the material studied. Therefore, the "native" is material that has to be studied initially by the power of observation, but it has also to be transformed to further become a "vision" and a "picture". Even though observation is still present in the initial state ("material") and in the augmentation of knowledge concerning the final stage ("picture"), we see that (in the transformation produced by research and in the passage from one phase to the other) there is an acquisition of two fundamental elements: (1) the material to observe becomes a picture that has the characteristics of a more general and complex whole and (2) the native becomes what he really is, an essence.

A rhetoric of observation is therefore fully confirmed in this analysis of the foreword written by Malinowski. In his ethnographies, it is an effective strategy to affirm the presence of the ethnologist in the field, his 'being there' who persuades the reader that his story is true, but it is also a manner to propose a method of research founded on a real and true contemplative epistemology and on an inductive method (Kilani 1990). What is even more stunning is that, at least in this foreword, observation has two values: it is used to apply to (and to contact) an object and to produce a transformation of this same object. This transformation is a synonym of knowledge. This knowledge is the result of a procedure that, just because it is built on the hermeneutic power of observation, (1) eliminates the problem concerning the complicated interaction with the native and (2) affirms an episteme typical of western thought. Even though Malinowski is considered the father of participant observation, this oxymoron, at least in this foreword, is solved in favour of observation while the native, rather than an individual with whom to interact, is seen as an object to observe. As far as the western episteme (implicitly suggested by Malinowski) is concerned, we can say that it is founded on observation as an instrument of truth and on the augmentation of knowledge obtained through the application of observation that reveals the interiority (and the essence) of things. The 'truth' advanced by this kind of western



knowledge is associated to (1) visibility as a whole ("picture"), to a (2) static object ("material") and to a (3) penetration of the external façade in order to bring (a) what is the internal ("mind") to the (b) external surface ("the native as he is").

This association is even stronger in the following passage of the foreword:

They have allowed us to penetrate into his mind far more deeply than we have ever done before. (Malinowski 1922a: xv)

By reading these lines, one realizes that it is not only a question concerning the way an ethnologist shows himself (on location and in the text he writes) and how he sees his object (his conception of Otherness). More specifically, in this foreword, an implicit knowledge 'passes' underneath the appearance of a newly conceived discipline. This fragment is, therefore, fundamental because it solves (or tries to solve) an implicit oxymoron lying in the ethnologist's program based on the difference (and association) between the categories subject/object and external/internal. Initially, the native is de-subjectivised and becomes material to be observed for a subject (the ethnologist); afterwards, observation allows the ethnologist to overcome the frontier separating the 'external envelope' and the 'internal essence' and to penetrate into the depths behind the surface in order to bring outside what was hidden. The (apparent) paradox is that, initially, it is given value to the external object (corresponding to de-subjectivation); afterwards, it is given value to what, logically, could not be seen: the internal essence.

Even though both themes are dear to western tradition ('penetration into an interior' and 'valorisation of essence'), the originality of Malinowski's approach consists in the association of the conflicting terms (the oxymoron) and in its development into a narrative syntagm that transforms the paradigms that constitute it (subject/object; external/internal) into a powerful instrument of knowledge: that is a story in which 'observation' is an instrument of knowledge and, in the meantime, it is a semantic operator of essences into visible materials that keep an 'essential' value. What has to be underlined is that this transformation of the oxymoron (of knowledge into a narrative intrigue) precedes and implies another, more famous oxymoron: the participant observation and the rhetoric of the ethnologist's presence as a truthful saying. To say this differently, the oxymoron regarding

participant observation is the result of a more basic oxymoron: the de-subjectivation of the native (subject → object) and the 'penetration' into the internal depths of his mind (external → internal). In the foreword, the resolution of this oxymoron remains conflicting because, on one hand, the ethnologist's observation is equally a means to seize 'what is outside' (based on the couple subject/object) and 'what is inside' (based on the couple external surface/internal mind) and, on the other hand, participation (even if less important than observation) demands somehow the recognition of the status of subject to the native.

One can suppose that this specific organization of the oxymoron is both the outcome of Malinowski's belonging to western culture and the fruit of his originality. In this perspective, the passage from an improvised ethnology (the amateur) or an old-fashioned ethnology (the Evolutionist) to a professional ethnology is not as marked as Malinowski would like to make us believe in the incipit. Firstly, because the relationship between observation and participation is not obvious. Participation and fieldwork, usually considered innovative elements introduced by Malinowski<sup>3</sup>, are actually dependant on the observation of a subject who does not fully seize, in the field, the dynamism of Otherness, and 'carries' elsewhere (geographically, in far-reaching locations) the spirit of the laboratory research of the nineteenth century European man. Secondly, the "picture" that Malinowski would like to seize (culture as a whole to study in itself) has also the goal, more typical of Evolutionism, to take into consideration, through the primitive, the origin of Man. The native's Otherness, then, rather than a whole composed of parts with constitutive rules, is transformed into a sort of 'originally degraded identity' of mankind, an object (the native) lagging behind in the history of evolution:

From the new material scientifically hall-marked, students of comparative Ethnology have already drawn some very important conclusions on the origin of human customs, beliefs and institutions; on the history of culture, and their

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<sup>3</sup> For a critical discussion concerning this point and the parallel importance of history that 'situates' the researcher in time and space see Valeri 2002. For a further development on the related question concerning subjectivity in anthropology and in some related fields see Buttitta 2003.

spread and contact; on the laws of human behaviour in society, and of the human mind. (Malinowski 1922a: xv)

As shown in this fragment, the polemics with the previous schools and with the amateurs is not centred on a monolithic and exclusive definition of culture. In fact, in the foreword one can see an alternation of at least two definitions: one more functionalist that considers natives as an object to study as a whole constituted of integrated parts and another more evolutionist that conceives the native as a primitive prototype of the man of the past to study to get to conclusions on the origin of modern man and on the evolution that brought mankind from primitive man to civilized man. In other terms, the primitive man is seen sometimes as a man to study as a product of his culture and sometimes as a specimen of the past. Both definitions are not conflicting with two main recurrent features: insufficient time and the power of observation. These features characterize research:

The hope of gaining a new vision of savage humanity through the labours of scientific specialists opens out like a mirage, vanishing almost as soon as perceived. For though at present, there is still a large number of native communities available for scientific study, within a generation or two, they or their cultures will have practically disappeared. The need for energetic work is urgent, and the time is short. Nor, alas, up to the present, has any adequate interest been taken by the public in these studies. The number of workers is small, the encouragement they receive scanty. I feel therefore no need to justify an ethnological contribution which is the result of specialised research in the field. (Malinowski 1922a: xv-xvi)

To realize the importance of these features in the foreword, it is enough to bring to remembrance a few terms belonging to the semantic field of observation ("vision", "mirage", "vanishing", "perceived") and to the temporal axis ("within a generation", "disappeared", "short"). The association between these two elements ('observation' as an instrument of penetration of Otherness and fleeting 'time' as a means to produce acceleration) is not casual. In fact, besides confirming traces of evolutionist thought in the epistemology conceived by Malinowski, this association suggests that the goal of ethnology should consist more in the search of 'essences' to encase in the path of mankind rather than in the study of dynamism and relationship inside a system. Actually, both paths of research, one

more functionalist and another more evolutionist, intermingle in the foreword and they are not clearly distinguished.

Conversely, in the following passage the implied enunciator speaks for the first time and qualifies himself directly through the first person of the pronoun "I" to communicate, this time with determination, what are the features characterizing Functionalism: fieldwork and a holistic conception of culture. Malinowski points it out:

In this volume I give an account of one phase of savage life only, in describing certain forms of inter-tribal, trading relations among the natives of New Guinea. This account has been culled, as a preliminary monograph, from Ethnographic material, covering the whole extent of the tribal culture of one district. One of the first conditions of acceptable Ethnographic work certainly is that it should deal with the totality of all social, cultural and psychological aspects of the community, for they are so interwoven that not one can be understood without taking into consideration all the others. The reader of this monograph will clearly see that, though its main theme is economic — for it deals with commercial enterprise, exchange and trade — constant reference has to be made to social organisation, the power of magic, to mythology and folklore, and indeed to all other aspects as well as the main one. (Malinowski 1922a: xvi)

To communicate this message, the enunciator feels the need to speak in the first person and to refer overtly to a symmetrical figure: the "reader". As a matter of fact, the reader is intentionally mentioned because he represents the pole of the communication that has to confirm, with his explicit intervention, the 'clearness' and the 'foundation' owned by methodology. Furthermore, the reader is mentioned because he is connected to the refusal of the enunciator to justify his work in the previous fragment of the foreword ("I feel therefore no need to justify an ethnological contribution"). Malinowski refuses to give a justification concerning his own work because he is aware that the interest of ethnographies is limited to a specialized public and he would like, on one hand, to show the legitimacy of these studies and, on the other hand, he would like to open to a larger public and confirm this disciplinary knowledge.

To establish a direct communication between the enunciator and the reader, between a kind of 'doing' and the reception of this 'doing', authorises what has been prospected as a new discipline from the methodological viewpoint. In this perspective, the strategy concerning enunciation goes hand in hand with the rhetorical strategy. The



positive *sanction* is emitted from an enunciator who takes for granted to receive an acceptance from the addressee: the sanction of the reader is connected to the performance of the anthropologist-enunciator; the point of view of the reader (who can "clearly see") corresponds to the "account" of the anthropologist. Therefore, if the enunciator speaks as an "I" it is because he addresses to the corresponding figure of enunciation (a "you" represented by the reader) in order to stress the role of solitary hero that he is advocating.

If in the first part of the foreword, method was praised and the birth of a new ethnology founded on a positive knowledge was also proclaimed, in the second part the more specific duty of a subject (who has to accomplish a 'mission' based on some relevant features) is stressed: the solitude of his work, the displacement in a faraway and exotic country, the considerable duration in time, the linguistic competences, the natives' life as a 'spectacle' constantly before his eyes. Nevertheless, even in this segment, living with the natives becomes for the solitary ethnologist, more than a real participation, a spectacle to observe:

The geographical area of which the book treats is limited to the Archipelagoes lying off the eastern end of New Guinea. Even within this, the main field of research was in one district, that of the Trobriand Islands. This, however, has been studied minutely. I have lived in that one archipelago for about two years in the course of three expeditions to New Guinea, during which time I naturally acquired a thorough knowledge of the language. I did my work entirely alone, living for the greater part of the time right in the villages. I therefore had constantly the daily life of the natives before my eyes, while accidental, dramatic occurrences, deaths, quarrels, village brawls, public and ceremonial events, could not escape my notice. (Malinowski 1922a: xvi-xvii)

More generally, the attempt is, on one hand, to obtain the recognition of Functionalism's methodological objectivity (from the implied reader) and, on the other hand to underline the power of penetration into the natives' culture possessed by a subject provided with specific competences. One might say, without exaggeration, that all the foreword tends towards the effacement of the opposition existing, in principle, between a method declared objective and a solitary hero who cannot help being an individual subject (of observation, comprehension, effort, capacity to learn, to resist, and so on). We can easily compare the ethnologist's work (as it is meant by Malinowski) with the process of penetration of the spermatozoid into an ovule.



Only one spermatozoid (the ethnologist endowed with competences who knows how to face the discomfort of life among savage peoples) has the privilege to penetrate into the ovule (the natives' culture). In both cases (the spermatozoid and the ethnologist), the mission can be considered accomplished if they overcome the barriers separating the 'external space' from the 'internal space' and when a selection is made in the group charged with the duty to penetrate (the weakest spermatozooids corresponding to the evolutionists and the amateurs). This comparison is not excessive. The value of 'penetration' (the overcoming of frontiers separating the 'façades' from the internal 'essence') and vertical digging is so rooted in our western culture that this parallel can help to highlight some mechanisms contained in our common thought and in the metaphorical dimension of scientific metalanguages (Montes 2006a).

In this perspective, the theme 'justification' acquires an additional connotation. It is a recurrent theme whose function is to diminish the excessive opposition between the first part of the foreword (defending the virtues of the functionalist method) and the second part (stressing the penetrating power of the single subject into the natives' culture):

In the present state of Ethnography, when so much has still to be done in paving the way for forthcoming research and in fixing its scope, each new contribution ought to justify its appearance in several points. It ought to show some advance in method; it ought to push research beyond its previous limits in depth, in width, or in both; finally, it ought to endeavour to present its results in a manner exact, but not dry. The specialist interested in method, in reading this work, will find set out in the Introduction, Divisions II–IX and in Chapter XVIII the exposition of my points of view and efforts in this direction. The reader who is concerned with results, rather than with the way of obtaining them, will find in Chapters IV to XXI a consecutive narrative of the Kula expeditions, and the various associated customs and beliefs. The student who is interested, not only in the narrative, but in the ethnographic background for it, and a clear definition of the institution, will find the first in Chapters I and II, and the latter in Chapter III. (Malinowski 1922a: xvii)

The oxymoron resulting from the association between the 'objectivity of method' and the 'observation of a single subject' is solved by Malinowski by using a powerful spatial figure which becomes, in itself, a general model for research. In effect, behind the theme of justification, the enunciator proposes some elements characterizing research that belong to the semantic field of space: a path upon which

one can install future research ("paving the way"), the axiologisation of becoming in terms of limits to overcome ("beyond its previous limits") and some coordinates concerning verticality ("in depth") and surface ("in width"). Space is therefore used as a referent to anchor an imaginary relative to 'progression', 'penetration' and the 'overcoming of limits'. The spatial metaphor is connected to the physical ethnologist's displacement that takes on a central relief in an exotic anthropology: the displacement is in effect essential and preliminary for the ethnologist's work and the subsequent participant (observation) in far-reaching locations is an integral part of his mission.

At this stage, it is necessary to bring to mind that participant observation is itself an oxymoron, a syntagm that associates two semantically conflicting concepts. It is inevitable that anthropologists tend to solve this constitutive oxymoron in one sense or another. In this foreword, the oxymoron is solved by neglecting 'participation' and by focusing on a process of 'de-subjectivation of Otherness': by effacing the native's authority and reducing him to material to observe. 'Observation', 'solidity' and 'passive presence' of the subject-object to observe characterize the discursive order implemented by Malinowski. 'Participation' is restrained to geographical displacement in a faraway country and to amplification of the anthropologist's solitude. To know, an anthropologist has to cope, by himself, with the complications of life in a village. Even though the foreword evokes the help received on location, the people mentioned are not part of the anthropologist's team who is, on the contrary, represented as an individual mastering the local language. Can one really master a language in a couple of years, keeping into account that an anthropologist works with people speaking different dialects? In any case, Malinowski speaks of the language as a means and an instrument to accomplish his research. In this way, he lays value onto the language as means to be used directly for communication, but he tends to consider it more as an instrument than a goal leading to the understanding of culture. Malinowski concludes, then, his foreword by official and ritual thanksgiving to all those people who contributed positively to his research.

By grossly summarizing the analysis of Malinowski's foreword, I would like to stress, among other central features, the exceptional importance of at least three oxymora, even if only one is commonly mentioned by specialists: participant observation. Logically, the

oxymoron conjugating participation and observation should be solved by a syntagm that highlights firstly 'participation' (above all learning the local language with natives) and secondly careful 'observation' (above all studying the natives). On the contrary, as we have seen, Malinowski combines (and solves) it in his own way. In synthesis, one can say that an 'ideology' of *programmation* prevails in the solution of oxymora and in the presentation of the ethnologist's work.

On this concern, it is impressive to compare this ideology, subject Malinowski's work, with the viewpoint expressed by Clifford Geertz (2000 [1973]) in his foreword to *The Interpretation of Cultures*. If Malinowski bases his research on the asymptotic and cumulative path of *programmation*, Geertz, on the contrary, in his fieldwork and in the interpretation of cultures, underlines the punctual and beneficial virtues of *coincidence*<sup>4</sup>. Each of these anthropologists resorts to a different 'ideology' considering it the only possible way to do fieldwork and to see ethnology. The recourse to one kind of ideology is also, more generally, a strategy to communicate to the public the only manner by which a specialist 'must' (Malinowski) or 'can' (Geertz) do fieldwork and, in the meantime, a manner through which one can affirm the presence (Malinowski) or absence (Geertz) of norms in the ethnologist's work. For Malinowski, it is a question of affirming the presence of normative features and, symmetrically, to endow ethnology with a scientific knowledge. Geertz's concern, on the contrary, consists in cancelling the possibility to conceive a program (theoretical and practical), preliminary to the presence in the field of the ethnologist who, for this same reason, can only proceed by being prey to coincidence, by adjustments and reconsiderations. To be more precise, for Geertz, the casual progression (and even, sometimes, the chaotic drifting) concerns both fieldwork and its communication to his readers:

When, at the beginning of the seventies, I undertook to collect these essays, all of them written the decade before, during the fabled sixties, I was far from

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<sup>4</sup> By using terms as *programmation* and *coincidence*, I make an explicit reference to the model proposed by Eric Landowski according to whom there are four fundamental intersubjective kinds of interaction: *programmation* (based on regularity and predictability), *adjustement* (based on reciprocity), *coincidence* (based on the unforeseeable) and *manipulation* (based on contractualization) (Landowski 2006).

clear as to what it was that interconnected them aside from the fact that I had written them. A number were on Indonesia, where I had been working for some years, a number were on the idea of culture, an obsession of mine, others were on religion, politics, time, and evolution, and one, which was to become perhaps the most famous, or infamous (it reduced both Marxists and advanced literati to angry sputtering), was a rather off-beat piece on the deeper meaning of cockfighting among the Balinese. (Geertz 1999: v)

As we have seen, Malinowski's foreword is accurately divided into two parts: in the first part, the enunciator camouflages his presence and ethnology appears as if it was speaking by itself (neutrally and transparently) about scientific foundations and norms; in the second part, the enunciator reveals himself as an ethnologist telling his fieldwork and, through this special *assumption of responsibility*, implicitly conferring a further and deeper scientific nature to ethnology. Both strategies fulfill a difficult and mirroring task: to assign a scientific value to ethnology and to establish a set of norms to consider as science. Conversely, (already in his incipit) Geertz lays stress, through the singular first person ("I"), on the inseparable syncretism associating a researcher and his field, the enunciator of the foreword and the writer of the text. The intention is to show that a researcher is only apparently a unity, a single person endowed with a clear direction and a definite program. As fragmented and incidental as the researcher in the field, the book is divided in different chapters which have no unit or global conception. To show it, the enunciator focuses on a precise theme: the lack of interconnection of the essays. More specifically, the enumeration is the stylistic figure that becomes, on this concern, the instrument to underline the variety of themes approached in the essays and the absence of a common lead. All these features (actantial syncretism, focalisation on the absence of interconnection, recourse to enumeration) indicate that, in his perspective, *coincidence* is all pervading in the performance of an ethnologist who cannot follow the principles of *programmation*. Since his research was the result of coincidences, his book also lacks interconnection and is the result of coincidence (and vice versa). The rhetorical question clears and underlines this 'non-connection' between incidental research and incidental chapters in the book: "Did they add up to anything: a theory? a standpoint? an approach?" (Geertz 2000b: v).

The question closes the segment concerning the incipit and, in the meantime, opens a new important section in which the enunciator



starts telling a story with a *sender* (the editor) who has also the role of a *helper* (the editor), an *object of value* ("a position" and "a slogan"), a *subject* potentially charged with a *performance* ("I"), but actually devoid of the necessary *competence*. Paradoxically, by writing the theoretical essay introducing and 'connecting' all the other articles of the book, the subject passes from a situation of imbalance (lack) to a situation of balance (solution of lack). This classical *transformation*, foreseen in simple fairy tales and in more complex literary stories, poses here a problem since the *cognitive acquisition* on the part of the subject is contradictory. How can an author-subject justify a theoretical essay if his perspective is based on the affirmation of coincidence and on the absence of a theory? By telling a story in which the subject of *performance* acquires the *competence* (that makes him ready for cognitive action) through a *manipulation* showing that even a theoretical essay is the fruit of a coincidence and not of a program intentionally conceived:

I didn't even have a title for the thing, much less a rationale. I had thought to call it *Meaning and Culture*, but the lamented Marvin Kessler, who was my editor at Basic Books, and whose idea it was in the first place to collect the essays, rightly did not think much of that — the evasion was too obvious, and the phrasing uninspired — and he urged me to write an extended analytical introduction stating my general position. I said I didn't know that I had one. He said (there were *editors* in those days): "You'll find one." And thus I produced "Chapter I. Thick description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," and discovered both a position and a slogan I have been living with since. (Geertz 2000: v)

Geertz acquires a 'theoretical awareness' by interacting with his editor who helps him to find out something he had previously ignored: a position and a slogan. One might say that Geertz passes from an ideology of *coincidence* to an ideology of *manipulation* ("You'll find one") and, for some aspects, to an ideology of *adjustment* ("There were *editors* in those days"). What is more impressing is that Geertz, by passing from one position to the other, does not speak of interaction with the native. The kinds of interaction that concern him are with his editor and with his writing.

This backward order of things — first you write and then you figure out what you are writing about — may seem odd, or even perverse, but it is, I think, at least most of the time, standard procedure in cultural anthropology. Some



pretenders to high science and higher technique aside, we do not start out with well-formed ideas we carry off to distant places to check out by means of carefully codified procedures systematically applied. We go off to those places, or, increasingly these days, ones closer by, with some general notions of what we would like to look into and of how we might go about looking into them. We then in fact look into them (or, often enough, look instead into others that turn out to be more interesting), and after doing so we return to sort through our notes and memories, both of them defective, to see what we might have uncovered that clarifies anything or leads on to useful revision of received ideas, our own or someone else's about something or other. (Geertz 1999: v-vi)

If Malinowski is more concerned with the problem of 'observation' than 'participation', Geertz is more concerned with the problem of 'writing' (and justifying a position) than interacting with his Other. As a matter of fact, both anthropologists neglect the active role that natives play in the construction of interaction and acquisition of knowledge. For Malinowski, the opposition existing between observation and participation is solved in favour of observation. For Geertz, the opposition existing between the process of writing and the preliminary idea is solved in favour of writing. Rather than outlining a hypothetical process of research, in its whole and its linearity, as a syntagmatic development in which some segments can prevail upon others or precede others (for example: selection of a problem → bibliographic research → first theoretical hypothesis → fieldwork research → participation → observation → fieldwork notes → interpretations → structurations → writing), Geertz prefers opposing, by using dichotomies, those who follow a "standard procedure" and the "pretenders to high science and higher technique": the value of the first ones is emphasized while the value of the second ones is cancelled.

As we have seen, Malinowski is in conflict with the Evolutionists, but he cannot say it overtly. Geertz cannot say what kind of anthropology he discredits, but, if one reads the whole foreword, one might suppose that Geertz thinks of Structuralism in negative terms.

The writing this produces is accordingly exploratory, self-questioning, and shaped more by the occasions of its production than its post-hoc organization into chaptered books and thematic monographs might suggest. (Geertz 2000b: vi)

Therefore, this foreword written by Geertz presents ethnologists as men without certainties in their work, men caught in the “web” of meanings they have themselves produced. Even though an ethnologist has acquired competences that make him suited for fieldwork (and for interpretations of cultures) he has to enact a series of interactions more with his editor (and his own texts) than with the real and true Others: the natives. In the case of Geertz, the ethnologist’s work is reduced to multiple forms of writing: (1) writing as conclusion of a research, (2) writing as introduction to a book, (3) writing as questioning of the anthropologist. In sum, these are all different ways of writing focusing on the return to the ethnologist’s Self, to his subjectivity devoid of any reference to what is usually understood as the real object of study: culture and Otherness.

The paradox is that, to advance in the crumbling of any form of *programmation*, Geertz produces a discourse based on dichotomies that reminds us of the binary oppositions used by Structuralists to speak of myth. As in the previous fragments (“standard procedure” vs “pretenders to high science”; “first you write” vs “then you figure out”), also in this part of the foreword, Geertz proceeds by using bipolar couples: for example, “occasions of its production” vs “post-hoc organization”.

This concluding phase of work — concluding until we go off somewhere again, or turn to other concerns — is consequently both crucial and a bit of sleight-of-hand. Crucial, because without it we are left with an assortment of vignettes and aperçus, fragments in search of a whole. Sleight-of-hand because it presents what is in fact a trailing construction as though it were a deliberated thesis happily confirmed. Anthropological arguments — and *The Interpretation of Cultures* is most definitely such an argument — are like excuses, made up after the stumblings that make them necessary have already happened. (Geertz 2000b: vi)

From the *aspectual* viewpoint, the ethnologist’s work is formulated by Geertz as if it was a process being continuously re-elaborated and reproduced. If coincidence is important for Geertz, writing, in its multiple forms, is determining: in the initial and in the conclusive phase of fieldwork. Stressing the multiplicity of writing is a manner to reject unity and homogeneity. ‘Coincidence’ and ‘process’ are associated in Geertz’s discourse to disrupt any form of static category and any form of preconceived essence (in favour of multiplicity and

dynamism). Even the conclusion of a work is considered as a postponement to another work, a dynamic non-conclusion. By this strategy, it is affirmed not only the quality of coincidence but also the importance of the *imperfective process* of the never-ending work. Slowly proceeding by using bipolar couples, positively stressing one term and negatively posing another one, Geertz amplifies the force of coincidence by reversing any possible cause and effect relationship: (1) between the essays of his book, (2) between the idea (that should precede) and its writing, (3) between a theoretical essay (that should introduce) and the other essays.

In any case, whether forethought or afterthought, general statements, such as that I was so fortunately pressed into (fortunately for the direction of my work and for its impact) in the "thick description" piece, make sense in anthropology as commentaries on particular inquiries, such as those which compose the rest of the book. Detached from them they seem mere promissory notes, empty boxes, possible possibilities. The pieces on a disrupted Javanese funeral, on Balinese conceptions of time and identity, on shadow plays or Indic states, and yes, on cockfighting and the closet melodrama of animalised status rivalry, are what give the more general statements, not just in the thick description piece, but in "Religion as a Cultural System," "Ideology as a Cultural System," or "The Growth of Culture and the Evolution of Mind," whatever suggestiveness and plausibility they might have. Despite my initial uncertainties, the book is a book, the chapters are chapters, and the whole has a certain informing rhythm. (Geertz 2000b: vi)

As a matter of fact, to elaborate a discourse of multiplicity and non-causality, Geertz cannot avoid building on some categories and generating hierarchies. Even though Geertz tries to disrupt all the logical relationships between cause and effect, he is compelled to admit that he has a position and the book has a coherence. This final acceptance is tautological: "the book is a book, the chapters are chapters". This is in harmony with the *isotopy* founding the more general discourse of Geertz's foreword: the justification, in any possible way, even resorting to tautology, of a work that would like to be free of constraints and essentially based on concrete situation and on particular coincidences.

Even though Geertz's discourse of justification is more evident, there is anyway behind it a more powerful discourse denying all efforts accomplished by Geertz to affirm non-causality and multiplicity: the opposition between the whole and the part, unity and

fragmentation, connection and separation. If Malinowski, to give a scientific foundation to ethnology, has to fix some criteria upon which to build the value of science, Geertz, to affirm a discourse of multiplicity and non-causality, has to insist on some features that give a solid foundation — exactly what he wanted to conjure up — to his discourse. Geertz concludes his foreword by debating himself in the web he himself created: on one hand, by stressing the importance of dynamic postponement (general research conceived as *non terminative process*) and, on the other hand, by founding the final value of a goal (his own research anticipating the “hares” to be chased by future ethnologists). One might malignantly suppose that the intention to crumble all general and fixed categories is the preliminary act to affirm the value of a single researcher: the value of his own specific research.

It is now more than a quarter of a century since it was published. It's republication now, after so much has happened, both in the world and in anthropology, is perhaps a sign that some of the hares I started then have turned out to be worth chasing. I am, in my case, still chasing them. (Geertz 2000b: vi)

By comparing Malinowski's foreword and Geertz's foreword, we can say that a question concerning the enunciators consists in the way one can lay a discipline with scientific value (Malinowski) and in the way one can highlight a specific and incidental performance of a researcher (Geertz). Fundamentally, both enunciators resort to stories that frame complex argumentations.

What kind of story tells Malinowski (and the enunciator who replaces him in the text)? In his foreword, at least two superposing stories are being told: the first one is the tale of the performance of a subject endowed with competences (Malinowski in the Trobriand Islands) and a discipline possessing a positive knowledge (ethnology); the second one is the tale of exchanged message (with relative sanction and counter-sanction) between an enunciator and addressee, between an enunciator who has to make the first tale believable and the addressee who has to confirm the validity of this message. As we have seen, both stories, distinguished from the viewpoint of analysis, are superposing and referring one another, in the text, in order to build the scientific nature of ethnological knowledge.



As far as Geertz's foreword is concerned, we can remark that the enunciator has recourse to two stories: the first one concerns the interaction between Geertz and his editor; the second one, larger and including, concerns the reformulation of the logical relationship of causality and reaffirmation of coincidence. The paradox is that, for an interpretativist as Geertz, he tells in his foreword, following a structuralist manner, a tale in which the discursive categories are laid by opposite couples. Equally paradoxical, to give value to coincidence (logically connected to context and 'being in situation'), the enunciator neglects the question of experience and stresses the importance of writing in its multiple forms. Finally, in Geertz's foreword a binary discursive epistemology and a style of thought that privileges the *non-terminative* and *imperfective* process are combined.

As far as I am concerned, the comparison of two forewords is a premise to a larger project based not only on similarities and differences existing between the textual genres of two great anthropologists (see, for example, Boon 1983 concerning Frazer/Malinowski). My project is also an exploration of the modalities according to which, in the ethnologist's work, some questions are interrelated and reformulated: the communication-interaction between *actants* and *actors*, the invention-application of metalanguages and the intercultural translation of concepts and processes. The starting hypothesis is that the *performance* of an ethnologist (or an anthropologist, the distinction being at this point useless) takes the amplitude of a syntagmatic process containing (and developing) the paradigmatic modelization of a discipline, of the society to which the ethnologist belongs and of the society to which the Others belong (Montes 2006b). In this perspective, the narrative intrigue of the evenemential and cognitive dimension, besides being an integral part of the effective ethnologist's work, can constitute, read in the light of semiotic analysis, a real and true epistemological configuration in which the features characterising the ethnologist's belonging (and more generally, the native-function) acquire a central meaning (Montes 2006a).



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## Просто предисловие? Малиновский, Гирц и антрополог как абориген

Сквозь призму семиотического анализа нарративная интрига работы антрополога (т.е. ее событийное и когнитивное измерения) обнажает эпистемологическую конфигурацию, заключающуюся в некоторых центральных проблемах антропологии: общение и взаимовлияние антропологов и других участников коммуникации, то, как антропологи изобретают и применяют метаязыки, и последовавший после изобретения метаязыка межкультурный перевод понятий и процессов. Для анализа названной конфигурации я сравниваю два предисловия: Малиновского и Гирца. В предисловии Малиновского имеются две совпадающие истории. Во-первых, история о действующем субъекте, только что наделенным профессиональной компетенцией (этнолог), и о научной дисциплине, которая обладает более современным и позитивистским знанием (функционалистская этнология). Во-вторых, мы видим симметричный обмен сообщениями (вместе с прилагающимися санкциями и противосанкциями) между высказывающимся (задание которого — заложить основы своей научной дисциплины) и адресатом (который должен принять решение по поводу обоснованности сообщений). Для сооружения основ своей науки высказывающийся имплицитно выдвигает эпистемологию, основывающуюся на определенных ценностях («вторжение», «прорыв», «преодоление ограничений»), предпочитая пространственную метафору и кумулятивный аспект процесса.

В предисловии Гирца мы находим две отдельные истории. Во-первых, история, касающаяся общения между Гирцем и его редактором, чтобы оправдать герменевтическую позицию исследователя. Вторая история гораздо объемнее и охватывает перевертывание каузальных отношений во имя оправдания важности случайности. Если в предисловии Малиновского названные истории используются для нового определения программных принципов (комбинация «трех оксюморонов» и «дисконтинуальности»), посредством которых

этнология могла бы приобрести научный характер и новые основы, то Гирц выделяет в своем предисловии именно «совпадение» и «письмо» в их всевозможных формах и комбинирует парадоксальным образом (для сторонника интерпретативности) бинарную дискурсивную эпистемологию с образом мышления, предпочитающим неконечные и несовершенные процессы.

### **Lihtsalt eessõna? Malinowski, Geertz ja antropoloog kui pärismaalane**

Semiootilise analüüsi prisma läbi paljastab antropoloogi töö narratiivne intriig (st selle sündmuslik ja kognitiivne dimensioon) epistemoloogilise konfiguratsiooni mõnede antropoloogia kesksete probleemide ümber: antropoloogide ning teiste osapoolte vaheline suhtlus ja vastasmõju, see, kuidas antropoloogid leiutavad ja rakendavad metakeeli, ning metakeele leiutamisele järgnev mõistete ja protsesside kultuuridevaheline tõlge. Nimetatud kompleksi analüüsimiseks võrdlen ma kahte eessõna: ühte Malinowskilt ja teist Geertzilt. Malinowski eessõnast leiame kaks kattuvat lugu. Esiteks, lugu toimivast subjektist, keda on värselt õnnistatud ametialase kompetentsiga (etnoloog), ning teadusvaldkonnast, mis valdab tänapäevasemat ja positiivsemat teadmist (funktsionalistlik etnoloogia). Teiseks näeme lausuja (kelle ülesandeks on püstitada oma teadusdisipliini alustalad) ja adressaadi (kes peab otsustama sõnumite kehtivuse üle) vahelist sümmeetrilist sõnumitevahetust koos sinnakuuluvate sanktsioonide ja vastusanktsioonidega. Oma teaduse alustalade püstitamiseks pakub lausuja implitsiitselt välja teatud väärtustel (“sissetungimine”, “edasi-minek”, “piirangute ületamine”) põhineva epistemoloogia, eelistades ruumimetafoori ning protsessi kumulatiivset aspekti. Geertzi eessõnas aga leiame kaks eraldiseisvat lugu. Esiteks lugu, mis puudutab suhtlust Geertzi ja tema toimetaja vahel (mitte suhtlust pärismaalastega), et õigustada uurija hermeneutilist positsiooni. Teine lugu on märksa ulatuslikum ning hõlmab põhjuslikkussuhete pea peale pööramist selleks, et kinnitada juhuslikkuse tähtsust. Kui Malinowski eessõnas kasutatakse nimetatud lugusid selleks, et defineerida uuesti teatud programmilisi põhimõtteid (“ebapidevus” ja “kolme oksüümoroni” kombinatsioon), mille kaudu etnoloogia võiks oman-dada teadusliku iseloomu ja uued põhialused, siis Geertz väärtustab oma eessõnas just “kokkusattumuslikkust” ja “kirjutamist” nende kõik-võimalikes vormides ning kombineerib (tõlgenduslikkuse pooldajale) paradoksaalsel moel binaarse diskursiivse epistemoloogia ja mõtteviisi, mis väärtustab mittelõplikke ja mittetäielikke protsesse.

## **The ethnographer as a trader: On some metaphors in the Komi fieldwork diaries**

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**Abstract.** Collecting ethnographic items for the Estonian National Museum has been linked to the practice of buying objects during fieldwork. Often we can find metaphors or expressions connected with trading in the Komi fieldwork diaries. Comparing ethnographers with merchants is a stereotypical way of describing the activities of Estonian researchers in the field. If ethnographers use, in their diaries, metaphors and expressions connected to trading, it may be just a spontaneous phrasing or inter-textual play of words. Inside the community of Estonian ethnologists there exists some kind of discourse style, which is followed in the fieldwork diaries, more or less consciously. This style of narration is also connected to the specific social and historical context in which ethnographers act. At the same time, even satiric inter-textual quotations do not exclude the possibility that some of this discourse is related to a deeper level of human consciousness.

In his *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, Bronislaw Malinowski argues that ethnographers must pay more attention to the context of their whole research process:

Many writers do not exercise the full searchlight of methodical sincerity, as they move among their facts but introduce them to us from a position of complete obscurity. I consider that only such ethnographic sources are of unquestionable scientific value, in which we can clearly draw the line between, on the one hand, the results of direct observation and of native statements and interpretations, and on the other the inferences of the author.



[...] In Ethnography, the writer is his own chronicler and the historian at the same time, while his sources are no doubt easily accessible, but also very elusive and complex; they are not embodied in fixed, material documents, but in the behaviour and in the memory of living men. In Ethnography, the distance is often enormous between the basic material of information [...] and the final authoritative presentation of the results. [...] A brief outline of an Ethnographer's tribulations [...] may throw more light on the question, than any long abstract discussion could do. (Malinowski 1987 [1922]: 3-4)

Perhaps, the most (in)famous fieldwork diary in the history of anthropology<sup>1</sup> is written by Malinowski during his stay on the Trobriand Islands (Malinowski 1967). This text caused a sensation as it consists of quite sharp opinions about indigenous people that Malinowski studied<sup>2</sup>. Naturally, most researchers feel sometimes tired and have been bored by people they live beside, although usually nobody recognises this. An anthropologist can modify his or her instinctual impulses in a socially acceptable manner by writing everything down in a diary, as Malinowski did.

The possibility to write down everything in our mind, during field trips, makes diaries somehow spontaneous and intimate documents. In Estonian ethnology, there exists an opinion that fieldwork diaries report "unwilling evidence" of history" (Pärdi 1995: 83). But the issue is not as straightforward as Pärdi states. In most cases, field travellers are professional ethnologists (this is the case with almost all Komi diaries of the Estonian National Museum), and thus one should be wary of examining the "unwillingness" of the message. Also, the conception of "stylistically pure and direct observation", suggested by Pärdi (1995: 83), should be further discussed. Supposedly, observation by an ethnologist tends to be charged with theories, attitudes, or else pre-suppositions. A researcher can also construct "direct experience" and thus expose the most illuminating aspects of his or her personality<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> We use the terms 'anthropologist', 'ethnologist' and 'ethnographer' as synonyms in this article.

<sup>2</sup> For example: "The boys and girls behaved in a silly or perhaps hostile manner" (Malinowski 1967: 71); "I was irritated by the *niggers*" (Malinowski 1967: 208); "I felt so low that even the company of those fellows was pleasant" (Malinowski 1967: 209).

<sup>3</sup> As it appears, Malinowski was also aware that his diary may somehow become accessible for extended audience: "I had some essential thoughts about keeping diary and adding depth to my life. [...] Ideas about the historical value of the diary" (Malinowski 1967: 170).



Clifford Geertz (1997 [1988]: 2) notices that anthropological texts seem to be based clearly on facts and are literary unpretentious. But somehow we can compare ethnographic writings with poems and novels, as we may find there complicated imagery, metaphors and phraseology.

The ability of anthropologists to get us to take what they say seriously has less to do with either a factual look or an air of conceptual elegance than it has with their capacity to convince us that what they say is a result of their having actually penetrated (or, if you prefer, been penetrated by) another form of life, of having, one way or another, truly "been there". (Geertz 1997 [1988]: 4–5)<sup>4</sup>

In the diaries, stored in the archives of Estonian National Museum (ENM), we can find more personal notes and thoughts than from the papers that are written purely for research purposes. At the same time, we must take into consideration that, although the fieldwork diaries have not been written for publication, the authors of these texts (who have been mainly professional ethnologists) were aware that their diaries would be publicly accessible. We cannot be sure to what extent one or another discourse in these texts was influenced by the factor of the potential use of diaries by other researchers.

The authors of this article have put themselves into a quite complicated reflective situation. From July to August 2006, we were a part of a research group doing fieldwork in the Komi Republic, among the *Vylysezhvasajas* ('the Komis of Upper Vychegda River' in Komi). Naturally, we wrote fieldwork diaries. But we had carried out research about the ENM's Komi diaries even earlier (see Leete 1998a; Koosa 2006). Thus, when writing our last year's fieldwork diaries, we were aware (and Art Leete has also recognised the issue during his earlier fieldwork trips) of the content of our colleagues' field-notes and this influenced us during our field research. But, at the same time, some spontaneous ideas have been left out of our notes because our colleagues' texts have been known to us and we consciously did not want to elaborate the same kind of discourse<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> About the construction of ethnographic and anthropological knowledge, see, for example, Atkinson 1994: 110; Biolsi, Zimmerman 1997: 7.

<sup>5</sup> Art Leete: Sometimes I have used hidden inter-textual quotations from previous Komi diaries in my field-notes. By doing so, I have had mixed feelings. It's because I felt myself too obviously on a power position. I had a possibility to put former researchers' texts into any context I wished. At the same time, I was

## Komi expeditions and diaries at the ENM

The Komis inhabit the north-eastern corner of the European part of Russia, westwards of the Ural Mountains. The Komi language belongs to the Permian branch of the Finno-Ugric language family. According to the last official census in 2002, there were 296 000 Komis and 125000 Komi-Permyaks living in the Russian Federation<sup>6</sup>. Traditionally, the Komis are divided into eight ethnographic groups by scholars.

The fieldwork trips to the Komis have been organised by the ENM in 1967 (among the Komi-Permyaks), 1969 (among the Izhma Komis, *izvatas*, and the Sysola Komis, *syktylsajas*), 1976 (among the *syktylsajas* and Luza Komis, *luzsajas*), 1981 (among the Izhma Komis), 1989, 1996 (among the Upper-Ezhva, or Upper-Vycheгда Komis, *vylysezhvasajas*), in 1997 (among the Lower-Ezhva, or Lower Vycheгда Komis, *ezhvatas*), 1998 (among the Udora Komis, *udorasajas*), 1999 (among the Pechora Komis, *pechorasa*) and 2000 (among the Yemva Komis, *yemvatäs*). From 2001 to 2006, the fieldwork has been done among the *vylysezhvasajas* and organised by the Department of Ethnology of the University of Tartu. Most of these fieldwork trips were conducted in cooperation with the National Museum of the Komi Republic (NMKR). From the mid-1990s, the NMKR has been represented in our team by Vladimir Lipin.

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sure that only few people (if anybody at all) would read these diaries and it was also unclear, if anybody could understand these hidden connections. Also, in later diaries I started to avoid metaphors, used by former ethnographers, because I did not want to create any intertextuality too consciously.

Piret Koosa: I have not used quotations or metaphors from previous Komi field-notes in my diary intentionally (in fact, I attempted to avoid this). But I had read over all previous Komi diaries at the archives of ENM and I had no previous experience in writing a fieldwork diary by myself. So it may be possible that stylistic and thematic influences of earlier texts (although not so conscious ones) can be found in my diary. My diary also consists of some hints to events of earlier fieldwork. But these hints may stay unnoticed by readers who are not familiar with these texts. And for sure, I was aware that my diary would be read by my fieldwork mates and, possibly, by a wider range of researchers. So I censored my notes essentially in some parts of the texts. It means, perhaps, that one cannot find too sincere emotions in my diary.

<sup>6</sup> See [www.perepis2002.ru](http://www.perepis2002.ru).

The topographical archives of the ENM contain 18 Komi fieldwork diaries<sup>7</sup>. These diaries are quite different in their character. Every author has his/her own, recognisable style. Earlier expeditions were dedicated basically to the collection of ethnographic items and so these diaries reflect mainly collection work. In this sense, diaries written by Art Leete, Janno Simm, Jaanika Jaanits, Piret Koosa and Kristi Tinkus do not deal with this topic to the same extent as the previous fieldwork notes, as during their fieldwork the collection work had lost its previous importance. This tendency is in accordance with the general change in Estonian ethnographers' fieldwork practices since the 1990s. Less attention is paid to the collection of items and researchers work more on participant observation and recording visual and textual materials (see Leete 1998b).

The diary of the 1989 expedition differs from the others because it is a result of a collective effort. Every day is described by a different fieldwork team member, as was the quite normal practice during the ENM's expeditions from the 1970s to the 1980s. We can guess that the awareness about the fact that all fieldwork participants could read each other's notes immediately, influenced the authors to apply self-censorship to some extent. At the same time, this situation could encourage some persons to attempt to use a more attractive style and we can also find some linkages between different parts of the diary text. For example:

*I documented data about the collected items into the collection entry book. [...] The diligent student<sup>8</sup> Eve started to fix numbers on these items. (TAp 858: 25, Alop 1989)*

*On our way back to the bus I was entrusted with a specific Komi manure fork, which I then tried to use to the full. Unfortunately, an eager museum worker, Terje could not evaluate the use of the dung fork as a walking stick. (TAp 858: 37–38, Randoja 1989)*

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<sup>7</sup> These diaries are written by Kalju Konsin (TAp 576 — 1969, 7 pp), Aleksei Peterson (TAp 679 — 1976, 82 pp), Edgar Saar (TAp 760 — 1981), Heiki Pärdis, Terje Alop, Aldo Luud, Anneli Säre and Eve Randoja (TAp 858 — 1989, 48 pp); Art Leete (TAp 909 — 1996, 25 pp; TAp 905 — 1997, 51 pp; TAp 915 — 1998, 34 pp; TAp 919 — 1999, 8 pp; TAp 924 — 2000, 10 pp; TAp 929 — 2001, 14 pp; TAp 933 — 2002, 14 pp; TAp 939 — 2004, 14 pp; TAp 941 — 2005, 17 pp) and Janno Simm (TAp 918 — 1998, 10 pp). Art Leete's diary from 2003 and diaries by Jaanika Jaanits, Piret Koosa, Kristi Tinkus and Art Leete from 2006 are not registered in the archive yet.

<sup>8</sup> Here and later, bold by the authors of this article.

## Discourses related to the metaphors of trading in the ENM's Komi fieldwork diaries

Collecting of ethnographic items for the ENM has been linked to the practice of buying objects during fieldwork<sup>9</sup>. So it is not surprising that often we can find metaphors or phrases connected to trading in the Komi fieldwork diaries.

In general, Kalju Konsin's diary is textually minimised, even further than suggested by Heiki Pärdis, to the form of "[...] boringly formal and dull accounts of 'what I ate this morning, how many households I visited, what kind of things I collected / did not collect, and what the weather was like'" (Pärdis 1995: 82). The laconic notes of Konsin can be interpreted as fulfilling a boring obligation to transfer something to the ENM's archives. But, anyway, the hint of trading in the Soviet style (an attempt to obtain objects that belong to the list of deficit goods) can be found even in this short text:

*Aug., 12<sup>th</sup>. — A ride by bus to Mezhadov village at Syssolski district in the southern part of Komi ASSR with A.M. Rubtsov, head of department of Syktyvkar Museum of Regional Studies<sup>10</sup>. Photographing buildings. Inquiry about clothes and buildings. Search for the possibility to **obtain** the exhibits. (TAp 576: 3, Konsin 1969)*

In his diary, Peterson often describes the collecting of objects by metaphors of trading. Peterson's expressions are closer to a description of business in the capitalist style:

*In one household there is a whole chest full of all kinds of socks and stockings, and the Syktyvkar women **bought** a lot. **We have spent a lot**. I had 150 roubles with me, in 2 days 50 roubles is gone. Soon we will be **bankrupt**. (TAp 679: 14–15, Peterson 1976)*

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<sup>9</sup> Analysis of the Komi diaries of the ENM reveals different kinds of metaphoric discourse. In this paper, we concentrated only on one possible approach. Beside the metaphoric discourses of object collecting, we can find information about different aspects of fieldwork in the Komi diaries: the organisation of a field trip, problems that occur while being in the "field", process of collecting work, local people's understanding of ethnologists' work and the way ethnologists have described their personal emotions in diaries, conditions of local everyday life, ethnologists' living conditions, their opinions about the work of local researchers and museums, contacts with the official institutions and the representations of local people's character.

<sup>10</sup> Nowadays NMKR.



*What can we get here? Mostly stockings and mittens. First of all women's stockings with beautiful patterns - just give 20 roubles, and the pair is yours! Too expensive, actually the work is worth it, all they ask is the same price (even 25 roubles per pair, and 5 roubles per mittens), as if they had agreed about it. You can buy or not if you do not want to. Bargaining would not help much. Also, there are shirts and sarafans available. The lower parts of the shirts have been removed, and the tops are sold for 3-5 roubles. So are the belts, not valuable. And this is all for textiles, represented by things. There are very few towels and other items. Towels tend to be new and bought, and sometimes embroidery is on the bought cloth. There are lots of wooden things, and often you can get them for free. (TAp 679: 23-25, Peterson 1976)*

*We called into some houses, and got some objects. First of all, both Nadyas<sup>11</sup> trade in textiles. (TAp 679: 36, Peterson 1976)*

*Now, we set out to a longer trip about 15 km from the schoolhouse along the asphalt. Some old crone takes us there, saying that there is all kinds of bric-a-brac available. (TAp 679: 37, Peterson 1976)*

*At first we were not lucky, but then all kinds of things were laid out. As we did not have any money, we could not do any shopping. We were not struck by anything worth buying. All textile goods were already known to us. (TAp 679: 46, Peterson 1976)*

*Here we get a number of things for free. (TAp 679: 50, Peterson 1976)*

*In two hours we are in the city and unload the cargo. (TAp 679: 77, Peterson 1976)*

Edgar Saar's expressions are more modest than Peterson's ones. Saar uses, like Konsin, descriptions that connect collecting to usual practices of obtaining deficit goods during the Soviet period.

*As I have obtained relatively few objects for the museum this year, I'll pay the main attention to obtaining objects. I got for the museum one more bag for handicraft, ladle, wooden platter, three rings and breast ornament, made by beads. (TAp 760: 45, Saar 1981)*

*For the museum, I was able to obtain the Komi woman's costume: a sarafan, apron, cloth cap and a jacket. I was also offered a child's maalitsa<sup>12</sup>, but as its fur was coming off, I did not buy it. (TAp 760: 45-46, Saar 1981)*

<sup>11</sup> In Peterson's diary, Nadya I is Nadezhda Mityusheva from the Komi State's Research Museum of Regional Studies (KSRMRS) (present National Museum of Komi Republic). Nadya II is Nadezhda Titova from KSRMRS, who also participated in the expedition.

<sup>12</sup> *Maalitsa* — a shirt-like coat of reindeer hide with the fur inside in the style of Nenets, Komi, Khanty, Mansi and the other Arctic peoples.



During the expedition of 1989, a self-ironic and reflexive statement about field collection work was made:

*As real travel sellers or peddlers, we have obtained quickly the Komi names of the main articles of trade as вѣнь — belt, дѡрѡм — women's shirt, сѣра чукки — ornamented stockings, тѹес — birch bark vessel, нецмѣрь — back-basket (made from birch bark) and some others, quite similar ones. (TAp 858: 31–32, Pärdi 1989)*

Expressions connected with trading can also be found in Art Leete's and Janno Simm's diaries:

*There is a lot of all kinds of stuff, of course. [...] Today as well I got for the ENM this and that. (TAp 905: 22, Leete 1997)*

*I paid for the stockings 100 roubles and for the mittens 30. I must moan just as the ethnographers of previous decades — items are costly, although actually the work is worth it. (TAp 915: 5, Leete 1998)*

*With the help of the locals we captured a lady, more than 90 years old. From her we buy several objects. [...] As we must carry all the obtained stuff on our backs, we can't stock weighty items. (TAp 918: 6, Simm 1998)*

*Another woman scuttled here and traded me a sarapan<sup>13</sup> & stockings. I have already bought five items. Lady did not tell me the price but I had no choice — the smallest banknote was 50 roubles. Vova<sup>14</sup> had escaped with the 10 rouble banknotes. (TAp 924: 4, Leete 2000)*

A metaphorical connection between the expeditions of collecting ethnographic items and trading trips appears in several fieldwork diaries of the ENM. Discourse of trading can be found, for example, in the diary of Gustav Ränk's<sup>15</sup> fieldwork among the Karelians as early as in 1929 (Ränk complains about quick bankruptcy — TAp 610: 26, 52; see also Nömmela 2006: 59). At the same time, clear inter-textual connections are not usually observable, although the expressions look quite similar in different diaries. But the discourse of trading is represented in all earlier Komi diaries in the ENM.

<sup>13</sup> Sarapan – 'sarafan' in Komi.

<sup>14</sup> Vladimir Lipin from NMKR.

<sup>15</sup> Gustav Ränk (1902–1998), one of the founders of Estonian ethnology, the first Professor of Ethnography at the University of Tartu.

## Discussion

Let us compare the self-reflections of Estonian field ethnographers with the metaphoric self-image of Estonian folklorists. Ülo Valk, Professor of Folklore at the University of Tartu, analyses the way Estonian folklorists described their work at the end of the 19th and in the beginning of the 20th centuries:

These are metaphors, similes and expressions that were drawn from the collective textual pool of the Estonian intellectuals, most of whom had their roots in the peasants' culture. [...] These ideas are connected with economic and cultural developments in Estonian village, with the growing number of farmers who had become masters through purchasing land from their Baltic-German landlords. (Valk 2004: 266)

Valk also writes:

Explaining and building up the value of something as vague as oral heritage was not simple in the earth-bound Estonian society, and it was easier to introduce new ideas by using the vocabulary of progressive farming, comprehensible for most people. (Valk 2004: 267)

A question appears: why do Estonian ethnologists continually use metaphors related to trade<sup>16</sup> and Estonian folklorists reflect their work metaphorically as agricultural? Perhaps, one part of the answer is related to the issue that collecting (and often buying) ethnographic items is, by itself, more close to trade than recording folk narratives, songs etc. During the ethnographers "trading" procedures objects will be given over to a new owner (an ethnographer representing the ENM). But folklore texts remain in the heads of the people even after the narratives or songs have been recorded for folklore archives. So we can apply the metaphors of agriculture more easily in the case of folklorists' fieldwork. One can "harvest" the same folklore "field" several times. The image of an ethnographer as "a peddler" may be also important in the case of Komi fieldwork. An ethnographer — a

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<sup>16</sup> In fact, the other popular images that can be found in their diaries of Estonian ethnologists are connected to hunting, fishing, gathering, robbery and war. But the analysis of these expressions is more closely connected to the specific vocabulary of the Estonian language and it is too difficult to attempt to write about these metaphors in English.

travel seller — moves from one remote village to another and makes some “trade” with local inhabitants.<sup>17</sup> In the case of Komi field trips it is hard to see the relationship with settled work that benefits the prosperity of fields of Estonian national culture (as it was an issue with Estonian folklorists a hundred years ago).

At the same time, we must take into consideration that Estonian folklorists presented their self-image as metaphoric peasants in public texts but the trader’s image of Estonian ethnologists can be revealed from fieldwork diaries, meant to be stored in the ENM’s archives. These diaries were not supposed to be public (although, in principle, everybody can read these texts in the ENM’s archive and there is always a possibility that some of those texts will be published). Anyway, it means that the image of Estonian ethnologists “as peddlers” is much more hidden from the public than the peasant’s image of folklorists. Obviously, in public texts no ethnologist will represent him- or herself as a trader. It does not look solid enough. In fact, Peterson has presented the Estonian ethnographer’s work to the public audience also through the metaphors of agriculture. For example, his book about the history of the ENM was titled “The Storehouse of Treasures” (Peterson 1986).

Konsin and Saar stay basically apart from the other Komi field researchers’ shared discourse’s style, related to trading metaphors (see Fig. 1). They both use sporadically the term “obtain” (*hankima* in Estonian) that is connected with the everyday jargon of the Soviet period, when ordinary people were forced to carry out a hard job in “obtaining” goods that were not available in stores. From the others, only Simm uses a similar expression.

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<sup>17</sup> Geertz, for example, reminds that if an anthropologist went off to remote non-Western societies, “there was no one else around, [...] or if there was — a missionary, a trader, a district officer, Paul Gauguin — he or she was mentally pushed aside” (Geertz 2001: 92). In our case, we can interpret the situation in a way that sometimes an ethnographer may take over the position of a trader, whom he or she has mentally dismissed.

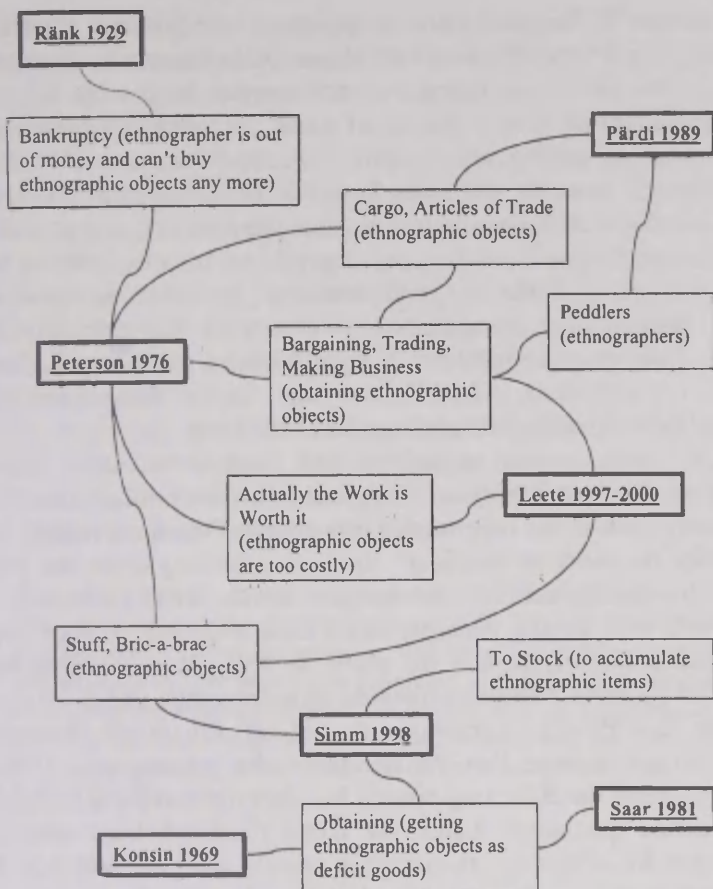


Figure 1. Relationship between the use of trading metaphors and expressions in ENM's Komi diaries (and Gustav Ränk's Karelian diary).

Although Ränk makes his field-note about bankruptcy already in 1929,<sup>18</sup> we can consider Peterson to be the real initiator of trading discourse in the ENM's fieldwork diaries (the Komis, perhaps, are just

<sup>18</sup> It may be possible that the trading metaphors and expressions can be found in many early fieldwork diaries of the ENM. ENM's archives consist of more than 900 fieldwork diaries and we are not familiar with all the material.

one example<sup>19</sup>). Peterson starts to designate ethnographic objects as “cargo”, “stuff” and “bric-a-brac” (*kaup, trään, kraam* in Estonian). Pärdi, Leete and Simm follow Peterson’s style (Pärdi adds the term *nõudluskaubaartiklid* — “articles of trade” in Estonian). Describing the process of getting ethnographic objects, Peterson writes about “bargaining”, “trading” or “doing business” (*kauplemine* in Estonian). Pärdi compares ethnographer to a peddler (*harjusk* in Estonian) that is clearly connected with trading paradigm. Leete uses expressions like Peterson (adding *ärime* — “to do business”, “to trade” in Estonian). Simm describes the accumulation of objects by the expression “to stock”. This style has parallels in early Estonian museology<sup>20</sup>. Simm makes his statement independently from former researchers. The connection is intuitive, although not less interesting.

Leete uses trading metaphors and expressions as a parody regarding Peterson’s way of describing fieldwork situations. It is especially clear in the case when Leete repeats Peterson’s remark that “actually the work is worth it” (both complaining about the price which the Komis ask for ethnographic items). Simm (who was on fieldwork with Leete), perhaps, heard these expressions from Leete and used a few of those in his diary, as well. Pärdi was definitely aware of Peterson’s attitudes towards collecting work and the style of writing. But Pärdi’s expressions do not actually repeat Peterson’s ones. So we assume that Pärdi follows the general way of how Peterson treats the collecting process but does not make any conscious inter-textual quotations. Later, the Komi fieldwork trips were not connected to collecting ethnographic objects anymore and thus the trading metaphors and expressions disappear from the diaries.

By drawing more or less conscious allusions between the Komi fieldwork diaries, later researchers attempt to distance themselves from Peterson’s aggressive and extensive collecting tactics. These (quasi-)quotations have been made in humorous way. Later re-

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<sup>19</sup> For example, Peterson uses expressions such as “stuff”, “trading” and “making business” also in his Udmurt fieldwork diaries (see Peterson 2006: 25, 36, 68, 69).

<sup>20</sup> F. Linnus described the ENM’s collections as “unorganized stock of old things” (Leinbock 1930: 45). A. M. Tallgren wrote about the threat that ENM would remain just “a reserve stockhouse of old treasures” (*vanavara tagavaraladu* in Estonian) or “an unorganized stock of curiosities and devices” (Tallgren 1921a: 5; 1921b: 2).



searchers try to point at the grotesque that can be observed in Peterson's working and writing style. Just imagine: communist Peterson acts and expresses himself according to the paradigm of capitalist economic discourse. He trades with the Komis as a peddler and complains about the possible bankruptcy. And Soviet citizens meet only modest moral standards concerning trade: they are not willing to give much away without getting paid. Can we observe some silent irony towards the Soviet regime if we see that capitalist attitudes are very much alive among the Komi population? Or was the practice of collecting items, in fact, an attempt to "obtain deficit goods" in the Soviet style and just decorated by capitalist-style discourse in fieldwork narratives?

As it appears, the ENM's Komi fieldwork diaries' texts include several discourses related to the metaphoric concept of trading. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980 and 1999) interpret the everyday level of thinking as largely metaphoric:

The concepts that govern our thought are not just matters of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details. Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities. If we are right in suggesting that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, then the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor. (Lakoff, Johnson 1980: 3)

And:

They [metaphors] cut to the deepest questions of what we as human beings are and how we understand our everyday world. (Lakoff, Johnson 1999: 118)

We are not sure that the analysis of the ENM's Komi fieldwork diaries confirms this view adequately. Even if ethnographers use in their diaries metaphors and expressions connected to trading, it does not necessarily reflect any deeper layers of thinking. It may be just a spontaneous phrasing or inter-textual play of words. Inside the community of Estonian ethnologists circulates some kind of discursive style that is followed in the fieldwork diaries more or less consciously. This style of narrating is also connected to the specific social and historical context in which the ethnographers act. At the same time, even satiric inter-textual

quotations do not exclude the possibility that some discourses are related to 'deeper' level of human consciousness.<sup>21</sup>

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### **Этнограф как торговец: о метафорах в дневниках полевых работ в Коми**

Собирание материалов для Музея эстонского народа всегда было связано с покупкой предметов в ходе полевых работ. В дневниках полевых работ мы часто находим связанные с торговлей метафоры и выражения. Сравнение этнографов с торговцами является стереотипным образом в описаниях полевых работ эстонских ученых, причем можно отметить определенную модель дискурса, которой более или менее сознательно следуют авторы. Разумеется этот стиль рассказывания связан со специфическим социальным и историческим контекстом деятельности этнографов. В то же время, учитывая обнаруженные сатирические интертекстуальные аллюзии, нельзя исключать и возможность того, что некоторые дискурсы связаны с более глубокими уровнями человеческого сознания.

**Etnograaf kui kaupmees: metafooridest  
komi välitööpäevikutes**

Etnograafiliste materjalide kogumine Eesti Rahva Muuseumi jaoks on ajalooliselt olnud seotud esemete kokkuostmisega välitööde käigus. Komi välitööpäevikutest leiab tihti kauplemisega seotud metafoore ja väljendeid. Etnograafide võrdlemine kaupmeestega on stereotüüpne kujund eesti teadlaste välitööde kirjeldustes. Kui etnograafid kasutavad oma märkmikes metafoore või väljendeid, mis on seotud kauplemisega, siis võib see olla kas spontaanne sõnavalik või intertekstuaalne sõnamäng. Eesti etnoloogide välitööde päevikutes võib täheldada teatud diskursuse-tüüpi, mida vähem või rohkem teadlikult järgitakse. See jutustamisstiil on loomulikult seotud etnograafide tegevuse spetsiifilise sotsiaalse ja ajaloolise kontekstiga. Samal ajal ei saa lausa satiiriliste intertekstuaalsete viidete tõttu välistada ka võimalust et nii mõnigi diskursus on seotud sügavamate inimteadvuse tasanditega.

## Carré sémiotique et interprétation des récits mythiques

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**Abstract.** *Semiotic square and the interpretation of myths.* Greimas' *semiotic square* is built upon the hypothesis that the concept of *elementary structure of signification* is operational only if subjected to a logical interpretation and formulation. However, Greimas' commentaries on that model are questionable. On the one hand, he asserts that logical nature of the connection between any two terms,  $s_1$  and  $s_2$ , is undetermined; on the other hand, he provides the relations  $s_1 - \text{non } s_1$ ,  $s_2 - \text{non } s_2$ ,  $s_1 - \text{non } s_2$  and  $s_2 - \text{non } s_1$  with a logical status. Now, since these two statements are inconsistent, a choice must be made: either these four relations have a logical significance, and then the *semiotic square* is a *logical square*, so that  $s_1 - s_2$  has to be interpreted as an *incompatibility relation*; or  $s_1 - s_2$  has no logical meaning, and then not only the status of the other relations given in the model is not logical either, but also the simple fact of applying negation to the terms  $s_1$  and  $s_2$  is meaningless.

That dilemma follows from an argument, that Greimas has laid down as a principle, under which linguistic communication depends on the existence of a *deep level* (or *immanent level*) of the significance, that is supposed to precede its manifestation in speech. If, conversely, we assume that significance is produced at discursive level, and that consequently the patterning of linguistic codes relies on what could be called a *semantic sedimentation process*, which comes out from linguistic activity, there is no more dilemma.

Such a thesis, which implies that the *elementary structure of signification* must be seen as the schematization by the describer of speakers' mental activity, leads to a point of view inversion. Nevertheless, the two conditions which, according to Greimas, are required for catching the meaning are still relevant, except that, contrary to Greimas' opinion, they now apply at the speech level: two discursive units can be opposed if they simultaneously include a common feature which join them, and a distinguishing feature which disjoin them.



In order to illustrate that point, an analysis of two short amerindian myths, which Lévi-Strauss has already investigated, will be undertaken, and finally specific problems related to the interpretation of that kind of narratives will be outlined.

J'ai rencontré la pensée de Algirdas Julien Greimas lorsque j'ai entrepris d'analyser des mythes d'origine de la riziculture que j'avais recueillis au Laos (Pottier 1994), ce qui m'a amené, non seulement à réfléchir sur la signification anthropologique des thèses de cet auteur, mais aussi à réinterpréter, ou à reformuler, certaines d'entre elles. C'est de ces considérations que je voudrais vous faire part aujourd'hui.

Au point de départ de la démarche de Greimas, il y a une réflexion, de portée extrêmement générale, sur la notion même de signification. Dès les premières pages de son ouvrage intitulé *Sémantique structurale* (1986; 1<sup>ère</sup> édition en 1970), qui est généralement considéré comme le texte fondateur de ce qu'on a appelé "l'école de sémiotique de Paris", Greimas s'interroge sur les conditions minimales de la saisie du sens. Fidèle à l'enseignement de Saussure, la réponse qu'il propose est que "la signification présuppose l'existence de la relation" (Greimas 1986: 19), mais il précise immédiatement (et c'est sur ce point qu'il commence à innover) que la relation possède une "double nature : elle est à la fois conjonction et disjonction" (Greimas 1986: 20). Il en résulte que, pour saisir la relation entre deux termes, deux conditions doivent, selon Greimas, être réunies:

- 1) Conformément au principe saussurien selon lequel la langue est faite d'oppositions, ces deux termes doivent posséder un trait distinctif qui les disjoint.
- 2) Ils doivent aussi posséder un élément commun qui les conjoint, car épistémologiquement, deux objets ne peuvent être comparés que s'ils partagent au moins un trait identique, ce qui, linguistiquement, revient à dire que deux termes ne sont opposables que s'ils appartiennent au même axe sémiotique.

Greimas a cherché par la suite à élaborer le modèle de la "structure élémentaire de signification" qui rend compte de l'articulation des "structures profondes et abstraites", et qui permet de "représenter les faits sémiotiques antérieurement à la manifestation" (Greimas, Courtés 1993: 363). La construction de ce modèle, que Greimas a appelé "le carré sémiotique" repose sur le principe que les faits sémiotiques

sont, au moins partiellement, interprétables en termes logiques, et c'est ce principe, que je voudrais maintenant soumettre à discussion, car il n'est pas dépourvu de conséquences quant à la manière d'aborder l'analyse des récits.

Selon Greimas,

le concept de structure élémentaire ne peut devenir opératoire que si celle-ci est soumise à une interprétation et à une formulation logiques. C'est la typologie des relations élémentaires (contradiction, contrariété, complémentarité) qui ouvre la voie à de nouvelles générations de termes interdéfinis, et qui permet de donner une représentation de la structure élémentaire sous forme de carré sémiotique. (Greimas, Courtés 1993: 362)

Sur la base de ces principes, Greimas considère deux termes objets quelconques  $s_1$  et  $s_2$  à partir desquels il engendre, par application de la négation, les deux termes contradictoires **non**  $s_1$  et **non**  $s_2$ . À des fins didactiques, il construit ensuite un schéma sur lequel il dispose en carré les quatre termes obtenus, et où il fait figurer les relations qu'ils entretiennent entre eux. Plutôt que d'avoir recours à cet artifice visuel, je raisonnerai, pour résumer le commentaire que fait Greimas de ces relations, sur l'opposition nature vs culture, que notre auteur considère comme un universel sémantique (à tort, du reste, ainsi qu'il ressort des travaux de Philippe Descola — cf. 2006).

- La relation  $s_1$  vs **non**  $s_1$  est appelée par Greimas "relation de contradiction". Il la définit "par l'impossibilité qu'ont deux termes d'être présents ensemble" (Greimas, Courtés 1993: 30). Dans notre exemple, cela signifie qu'un objet ne peut pas être à la fois naturel et non naturel. Du point de vue d'une logique de classes, poser l'existence de la classe **non**  $s_1$  revient à affirmer que la classe  $s_1$  ne se confond pas avec l'univers du discours (tous les objets de cet univers ne sont pas naturels, sinon la notion même de nature perdrait toute signification): comme toute classe logique,  $s_1$  a nécessairement un complément **non**  $s_1$ . Du point de vue d'une logique de propositions, la relation  $s_1$  – **non**  $s_1$  est une relation d'alternative (tout objet de l'univers du discours considéré est nécessairement soit naturel, soit non naturel).
- Il va de soi que le même raisonnement s'applique à la relation  $s_2$  vs **non**  $s_2$ . Greimas appelle dès lors "relations de complémentarité" les relations  $s_1$  – **non**  $s_2$  et  $s_2$  – **non**  $s_1$ . Du point de vue d'une

logique de classes, ce sont des relations d'inclusion, et du point de vue d'une logique de propositions, ce sont des relations d'implication. Si l'on poursuit l'exemple précédent, cela signifie que la classe des objets naturels ( $s_1$ ) est incluse dans la classe des objets non culturels (**non**  $s_2$ ), comme celle des objets culturels ( $s_2$ ) est incluse dans celle des objets non naturels (**non**  $s_1$ ), ce qui revient à dire, dans les termes de la logique des propositions, que l'existence d'objets naturels implique l'existence d'objets non culturels (ou encore que l'existence d'objets naturels implique que tous les objets de l'univers du discours considéré ne sont pas culturels), et que de même l'existence d'objets culturels implique celle d'objets non naturels.

- Enfin, Greimas appelle "relation de contrariété" la relation entre les deux termes-objets initialement considérés  $s_1$  et  $s_2$ . Il explique que la nature logique d'une telle relation reste indéterminée parce que ces deux termes "sont susceptibles d'être présents de manière concomitante" (Greimas, Courtés 1993: 31).

C'est à ce point précis qu'on voit apparaître dans l'argumentation de notre auteur une difficulté, qui tient essentiellement à l'articulation entre structures logiques et structures sémiotiques. Tout en indiquant qu'il "peut être utilement comparé à l'hexagone de R. Blanché, aux groupes de Klein et de Piaget", Greimas souligne que le carré sémiotique relève "de la problématique épistémologique portant sur les conditions de l'existence et de la production de la signification", de sorte qu'il "se distingue [...] des constructions logiques, ou mathématiques, indépendantes, en tant que formulation de syntaxe pure" et que, par conséquent, "toute identification hâtive des modèles sémiotiques et logico-mathématiques ne peut être [...] que dangereuse" (Greimas, Courtés 1993: 32).

Greimas affirme donc clairement, dans ce passage, que les structures sémiotiques ne sont pas assimilables à des structures logiques, ce qui paraît quelque peu contradictoire avec le principe, qui lui a servi de point de départ, selon lequel la structure élémentaire de la signification ne peut devenir "opératoire" qu'à condition d'avoir été soumise "à une formulation logique". C. Calame a, dès lors, beau jeu d'objecter qu'en réalité, le carré sémiotique est construit sur le modèle du carré logique (Calame 1977: 325). Essayons de développer ce point. On a montré depuis longtemps que les connecteurs logiques

peuvent être regroupés en quaternes, selon une structure qui possède des propriétés remarquables. Selon Robert Blanché, celle-ci "apparaît lorsqu'un terme comporte deux sortes de négations, une forte (postposée) et une faible (préposée), qui, en se composant, donne un quatrième terme" (Blanché 1968: 55). Pour ceux qui ne seraient pas familiarisés avec le vocabulaire de la logique, précisons que la négation forte porte sur le connecteur alors que la négation faible porte sur les termes de la relation. "Dans une telle structure", poursuit R. Blanché, "chaque terme est relié à chacun des trois autres par une relation d'implication (subalternes), d'alternative (contradictaires) et d'incompatibilité (contraires) ou de disjonction (subcontraires)" (Blanché 1968: 55).

Il est effectivement aisé de vérifier que si l'on assimile, comme le fait Greimas, les relations  $s_1 - \text{non } s_2$  et  $s_2 - \text{non } s_1$  à des relations d'implication, il en découle nécessairement que la relation  $s_1 - s_2$  est une relation d'incompatibilité (celle-ci équivalant, en logique des propositions à la négation de la conjonction, et correspondant en logique de classes au complément de l'intersection), car les propositions " $s_1$  implique  $\text{non } s_2$ ", " $s_2$  implique  $\text{non } s_1$ " et " $s_1$  incompatible avec  $s_2$ " sont logiquement équivalentes. Pour faire saisir intuitivement ce point, revenons à notre exemple : il revient exactement au même de dire que l'existence d'objets naturels implique celle d'objets non culturels, ou bien que l'existence d'objets naturels implique celle d'objets non culturels, ou encore qu'un objet ne peut pas être à la fois naturel et culturel. Réciproquement, si l'on pose que  $s_1$  est incompatible avec  $s_2$ , toutes les autres relations figurées dans le modèle du carré sémiotique s'en déduisent immédiatement. Il devient même possible de compléter le schéma en précisant que la relation  $\text{non } s_1 - \text{non } s_2$  est une relation de disjonction. Les nombreuses applications auxquelles procède Greimas (par exemple dans ses *Essais sémiotiques*) de la notion de carré sémiotique à, notamment, des catégories modales confirment du reste cette conclusion : qu'il s'agisse de catégories déontiques ou épistémiques, ses analyses recoupent très exactement les travaux des logiciens qui démontrent la possibilité de disposer les opérateurs modaux selon la formule du carré logique (cf. Greimas 1983: 67-133 et Blanché 1968: 83-88). Dès lors, de deux choses l'une : ou bien  $s_1 - s_2$  est une relation d'incompatibilité, et alors toutes les autres relations décrites par Greimas en découlent, mais celui-ci a tort d'affirmer que la nature de



cette relation n'est pas logiquement déterminée ; ou bien il a raison de maintenir une telle affirmation, mais alors il en résulte que les autres relations figurées par le carré sémiotique ne sont pas non plus logiquement interprétables et c'est le modèle lui-même qui doit être rejeté !

L'histoire des rapports entre la logique et le langage devrait nous inciter, me semble-t-il, à choisir la seconde option. En un sens, toute l'histoire de la logique est celle d'un effort pour s'affranchir des limites qu'impose au raisonnement formel la langue naturelle, si bien que les logiciens ont fini par inventer des langages symboliques qui n'ont plus du langage que le nom. Certes, il est possible de raisonner en langue naturelle, mais nous savons bien que, dès que le raisonnement porte sur des abstractions, l'exercice demande un effort d'attention, car il n'a rien de spontané. En d'autres termes, nous pouvons sans aucun doute traiter les catégories sémantiques comme des catégories logiques, mais il n'en découle nullement que celles-ci soient intrinsèquement, ou originairement, de nature logique.

J'ajoute qu'à maintes reprises, Greimas a lui-même dénoncé "les illusions des logisticiens qui pensent pouvoir opérer avec des formes sans signification" et qui oublient cette évidence que "nous sommes définitivement enfermés dans notre univers sémantique" (Greimas 1986: 117). La vraie question est donc de comprendre pourquoi, bien qu'il se montre conscient du caractère irréductible des procédures sémiotiques empiriquement observables à des opérations logiques, il a tenu à élaborer un modèle dans lequel il nous propose une formulation logique du concept de structure élémentaire de signification. La réponse à cette question, c'est, je pense, que le modèle du carré sémiotique est destiné à rendre compte, non pas des "faits de surface" (c'est-à-dire manifestes), mais d'un niveau "profond" où le divorce entre logique et sémiotique serait susceptible de s'évanouir. C'est la raison pour laquelle, selon notre auteur, "l'application quasi-mécanique de ce modèle aux phénomènes de surface ne constitue, le plus souvent, qu'une caricature des procédures sémiotiques" (Greimas; Courtés 1993: 363). On voit que la constitution même du modèle sur lequel nous nous interrogeons est inséparable du principe selon lequel la possibilité de la communication langagière est subordonnée à l'existence d'un "niveau immanent" de la signification, pour reprendre la terminologie de Greimas, qui serait antérieure à sa manifestation dans le discours. Or un tel principe va-t-il de soi?



Certes, pour que la communication soit possible, il faut bien que les locuteurs disposent de codes communs. Pour le sujet individuel qui apprend le langage le code précède le discours, mais il est également évident que, puisqu'il n'y a de signification que pour un sujet, seul le discours est producteur de significations. Il paraît donc raisonnable de postuler, à la suite de Patrice Charaudeau (1983: 15-36), qu'il y a antériorité logique du discours (c'est-à-dire des "faits de surface" dans la terminologie de Greimas), et que la structuration des codes linguistiques résulte, selon l'expression de Charaudeau, d'un processus de "sédimentation sémantique" qui s'accomplit au sein même de l'activité langagière. Cette hypothèse implique que les faits linguistiques qui se rattachent au "niveau profond" traduisent une certaine autonomisation des signes par rapport au discours, mais que cette autonomisation n'est jamais achevée et reste relative, ce qui permet de comprendre que les langues (les codes phonologiques comme les codes sémantiques ou syntaxiques) évoluent constamment et ne sont pas assimilables à des systèmes fermés. Il résulte d'une telle conception que le sens se construit au niveau discursif et ne saurait se déduire d'un processus de structuration des significations qui serait antérieur au discours. Comme le montre encore Patrice Charaudeau, la communication langagière suppose, de la part des locuteurs, un effort d'élucidation qui repose lui-même sur l'existence d'un savoir plus ou moins partagé (savoir sémantique, savoir encyclopédique et savoir socio-culturel), ce qui a pour conséquence que le sens d'un discours recèle toujours une part d'ambiguïté.

L'abandon du postulat de l'antériorité logique du "niveau profond" entraîne un renversement de perspective, mais il n'implique nullement de renoncer à la notion de "structure élémentaire de signification", car les deux conditions de la saisie du sens énoncées par Greimas n'en restent pas moins pertinentes. Il s'agit seulement d'adopter désormais un point de vue résolument constructiviste et de concevoir la structure élémentaire comme un schème purement mental dépourvu de tout statut objectal, ou plus exactement comme la schématisation par le descripteur de l'activité mentale mise en œuvre par les locuteurs. Prenant le contre-pied de ce qu'affirme Greimas, je soutiens dès lors, que les deux conditions qu'il énonce ne sont applicables qu'à des unités discursives. J'en déduis que deux unités quelconques du discours (deux lexèmes si l'on considère le niveau du signifié) sont opposables si elles incluent à la fois un trait distinctif qui les disjoints

et un trait commun qui les conjoint. Ces traits correspondent à des unités minimales de sens, donc par définition à des sèmes. Tout lexème renvoie, cependant, à une pluralité de sèmes. Dans le procès de la communication langagière, en fonction des contextes textuel et intertextuel (les compatibilités et incompatibilités qui naissent du rapprochement des termes, et les sélections de sens antérieurement effectuées dans le même texte ou dans d'autres textes auxquels renvoie celui-ci), ainsi qu'en fonction des circonstances de discours (situation d'énonciation et représentation collectives), le sujet parlant sélectionne les traits pertinents en les homologuant ou en les opposant, ce qui détermine des "effets de sens" que Greimas appelle des "sémèmes". Toutefois, l'unité minimale de sens qui est commune à deux unités du discours n'ayant elle-même d'existence que pour autant qu'elle s'oppose à une autre, il en résulte que la perception d'une opposition entre deux termes situés sur un axe sémantique déterminé est subordonnée à la possibilité de percevoir une opposition entre deux autres termes qui s'opposent sous le même rapport que les deux premiers, mais qui sont conjoints sur un axe différent, quoiqu'appartenant au même système sémantique (ou "code" dans la terminologie de Claude Lévi-Strauss).

Pour illustrer cette conception de la structure élémentaire de la signification, considérons l'analyse que nous propose Lévi-Strauss (1964), dans le premier volume des *Mythologiques*, de deux mythes amérindiens de l'origine du feu de cuisine, qui sont, selon lui, en rapport de transformation. Le premier de ces deux récits, qui est un mythe gé (Lévi-Strauss 1964: 74-75) raconte qu'aux premiers temps, le jaguar, qui connaissait le secret du feu de cuisine, utilisait, pour chasser, un arc et des flèches, alors qu'inversement les hommes ignoraient ces deux techniques. Un jour, le jaguar rencontre un jeune Indien qui se trouve en situation périlleuse. Il le sauve, et comme son épouse ne lui a pas donné d'enfant, il décide de l'adopter. Cependant, la femme du jaguar déteste notre héros et ne cesse de le menacer. Son père adoptif lui ayant donné un arc pour se défendre, il tue sa belle-mère d'une flèche, puis il s'enfuit, terrifié, en emportant ses armes ainsi qu'un morceau de viande grillée. De retour à son village, il distribue la viande. Les Indiens, décident alors d'organiser une expédition pour voler un jaguar le secret du feu. A la suite de leur succès, le jaguar, ulcéré par l'ingratitude de son fils adoptif, fait le

serment de renoncer à la viande cuite et de chasser avec ses griffes et ses crocs.

Dans le deuxième récit, qui a été recueilli chez les Indiens du groupe tupi-guarani, le secret de la cuisson des aliments est détenu aux premiers temps, non plus par un jaguar, mais par des vautours charognards urubu. Lévi-Strauss le résume en ces termes : “Le héros civilisateur feignit un jour de mourir, de façon si réaliste que son corps commença à pourrir. Les vautours allumèrent alors un feu pour le faire cuire, mais le héros s’agita, mit les oiseaux en fuite, s’empara du feu et le donna aux hommes” (Lévi-Strauss 1964: 149).

Faute de temps, je me dispenserai de reprendre en détail l’ensemble de l’analyse de Lévi-Strauss. Coupant au plus court, je me contenterai, en reprenant un propos que j’ai déjà tenu dans la conclusion de mon *Anthropologie du mythe* (Pottier 1994: 211 sq.), d’indiquer que cette analyse recèle au moins deux contradictions et une incertitude :

- Après avoir affirmé que les oppositions fondamentales mises en œuvre dans les deux récits sont cru vs cuit et frais vs pourri, Lévi-Strauss avance que la première définit l’axe de la culture, car le cuit est la transformation culturelle du cru, alors que la seconde caractériserait l’axe de la nature, car le pourri est la transformation naturelle du frais. Dans la suite de l’analyse, cependant, c’est l’opposition cru vs pourri qui définit l’axe de la nature.
- Initialement, il rattache les termes “cru” et “cuit” au seul axe de la culture. Ultérieurement, pourtant, il homologue l’opposition cru vs cuit à l’opposition nature vs culture, et par la suite, il reprend constamment cette interprétation dans les quatre volumes des *Mythologiques*.
- Il affirme que, dans le mythe tupi, c’est l’opposition pourri vs cuit qui est homologuable à l’opposition nature vs culture, et il précise que cette opposition a un sens plus radical que la précédente, sans qu’on sache très bien ce qu’il entend par là.

A l’évidence, le choix des oppositions pertinentes, dans les analyses de Lévi-Strauss, n’est pas dépourvu d’arbitraire et semble, dans bien des cas, répondre aux seuls besoins de la démonstration. De mon point de vue, cet arbitraire est inséparable du statut objectal qu’erronément Lévi-Strauss accorde à la notion de signification. Inversement,

lorsqu'on conçoit la structure élémentaire de signification comme un schème purement mental construit par les locuteurs, les contradictions que j'ai mentionnées se résolvent aisément. On s'aperçoit alors que les deux récits comparés articulent la même structure élémentaire de signification et que deux des quatre termes qui constituent cette structure apparaissent dans la narration alors que les deux autres restent implicites, avec cette différence, cependant, que les termes qui doivent être reconstitués mentalement par le récepteur du message pour percevoir la structure ne sont pas les mêmes dans les deux récits.

Dans le mythe gé, les termes cru et cuit, qui ont en commun, selon l'interprétation de Lévi-Strauss, l'élément culture, s'opposent entre eux sous le rapport non transformé vs transformé. Toutefois, la notion de culture n'a elle-même de sens que pour autant qu'elle est opposable à la notion de nature. La possibilité de percevoir l'opposition cru vs cuit est donc subordonnée à la possibilité de percevoir une opposition entre les termes frais et pourri, qui ont en commun l'élément nature, et qui s'opposent pareillement sous le rapport non transformé vs transformé. Dans le mythe tupi, en revanche, l'opposition des termes pourri et cuit, qui ont en commun l'élément transformé, s'opposent sous le rapport nature vs culture, si bien que la possibilité de percevoir cette opposition implique la possibilité de percevoir une opposition entre les termes frais et cru, qui s'opposent sous le même rapport, mais qui ont en commun l'élément opposé non transformé. (Pottier 1994: 212-213)

Je voudrais, pour finir, dire quelques mots des problèmes particuliers que pose l'analyse des mythes. Lévi-Strauss a montré que le mythe a ce qu'il appelle une "structure feuilletée". Cette expression imagée renvoie à une idée qui constitue, à mon sens, une contribution importante à la théorie du mythe, à savoir que l'articulation de tout récit mythique repose sur l'homologation de plusieurs codes. A titre d'illustration, il est facile de constater que le mythe gé met en œuvre trois codes différents: le code culinaire, le code de la chasse et le code familial. Leur homologation repose sur les équivalences suivantes :

- père = cuit = chasseur
- fils = cru = non-chasseur
- épouse (du père) = pourri = gibier
- mère = frais = non-gibier.



Il va de soi que les relations entre les termes constitutifs des codes mythiques sont d'ordre analogique, si bien qu'en un sens, chaque récit mythique (et, à la limite, la mythologie entière) constitue une métaphore développée. En conséquence, comme c'est le cas lorsqu'on interprète une métaphore, la perception d'une isotopie de signification passe par la construction, non pas d'une structure sémantique simple qui articule, des catégories sémiques, mais d'une structure méta-discursive qui articule des catégories interprétatives. C'est ce qui explique le recours par Lévi-Strauss à la catégorie nature vs culture, qui à l'évidence possède un statut purement interprétatif, puisqu'elle n'est pas donnée par les récits eux-mêmes. Il n'est pas absurde, en effet, d'affirmer qu'en transmettant à son fils les techniques du feu et de la chasse, le père lui transmet métaphoriquement la culture (ce qui rend compte de l'homologie du code culinaire et du code de la chasse), et que de même, en tant que détenteur de l'autorité au sein de la famille, il est le représentant des valeurs culturelles (ce qui fonde l'homologie du code familial avec les deux autres). Ce qu'on peut reprocher toutefois à une telle interprétation, c'est qu'elle repose sur l'utilisation d'une catégorie de pensée typiquement occidentale qui, si l'on en croit les travaux des spécialistes du monde amérindien est inconnue des Gé eux-mêmes ! Pour être légitime, l'interprétation des mythes doit donc reposer sur l'élaboration de catégories qui aient un sens pour ceux qui racontent et qui écoutent ce type de récit, soit qu'il s'agisse de catégories *emic* auxquelles la connaissance de la langue et de la culture aura donné accès à l'ethnologue, soit qu'il s'agisse de catégories dont on postule l'universalité, mais cette question, que j'ai tenté d'aborder dans *l'Anthropologie du mythe*, sortirait largement du cadre de cette contribution.

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### Семиотический квадрат и анализ мифа

Семиотический квадрат Греймаса построен на гипотезе, что понятие *элементарной структуры значения* работоспособно только в том случае, если его интерпретируют и формулируют в рамках логики. В то же время комментарии самого Греймаса по поводу этой модели оставляют желать лучшего. С одной стороны, он утверждает, что отношение между любыми двумя членами ( $s_1$  и  $s_2$ ) не определено. С другой стороны, он утверждает, что отношения  $s_1 - \text{не-}s_1$ ,  $s_2 - \text{не-}s_2$ ,  $s_1 - \text{не-}s_2$  и  $s_2 - \text{не-}s_1$  логичны по своей природе. Эти два утверждения противоречат друг другу и нужно выбрать одно из двух: или все эти четыре отношения имеют логическую ценность и весь *семиотический квадрат* является в этом случае *логическим квадратом*, что означало бы, что отношение  $s_1 - s_2$  является *несовместимым отношением*, или у отношения  $s_1 - s_2$  вообще отсутствует какая-нибудь логическая ценность. И это означает не только то, что и все остальные отношения в квадрате не являются логическими, но и то, что приращение членам  $s_1$  и  $s_2$  негативной ценности совершенно бессмысленно.

Указанная дилемма восходит к основному принципу теории Греймаса, согласно которому языковая коммуникация зависит от наличия *глубинного уровня* значения, которая предшествует речевому выражению. Но если мы решим, что значения возникают на дискурсивном уровне, и, исходя из этого, что процесс паттернизации языковых кодов, который можно назвать *процессом семантического оседания*, рождается от языкового действия, то дилемма исчезает.

Это решение предполагает, что элементарная структура значения является по существу схемой мыслительного действия разговаривающих, записанной аналитиком. Это в свою очередь означает и перемену позиции описывающего и говорящего. В то же время эти два условия, которые по Греймасу необходимы для понимания значения, по-прежнему существенны. Только в отличие от мнения Греймаса они теперь применяются на уровне речи: две дискурсивные единицы модно противопоставить, если они обе одновременно содержат какое-то свойство, их объединяющее, и какое-то свойство, их различающее.

Для подтверждения указанного утверждения в данной статье анализируются два мифа американских индейцев, которые в свое время рассматривал уже Леви-Стросс. В конце анализа приводятся и специфические проблемы, которые возникают при интерпретации подобных нарративов.

### Semiootiline ruut ja müü dianalüüs

Greimasi semiootiline ruut on ehitatud hüpoteesile, et *elementaarse tähendusstruktuuri* mõiste on töövõimeline vaid siis, kui teda tõlgendatakse ja formuleeritakse loogikat järgides. Samas on Greimasi kommentaarid selle mudeli kohta küsitava väärtusega. Ühelt poolt väidab ta, et ükskõik millise kahe liikme ( $s_1$  ja  $s_2$ ) vaheline suhe on määratlemata. Teiselt poolt väidab ta, et suhted  $s_1 - \text{mitte-}s_1$ ,  $s_2 - \text{mitte-}s_2$ ,  $s_1 - \text{mitte-}s_2$  ja  $s_2 - \text{mitte-}s_1$  on loomult loogilised. Need kaks väidet on vastuolulised ja tuleb teha valik: kas kõik need neli suhet on loogilise väärtusega ja kogu *semiootiline ruut* on seega *loogiline ruut*, mis tähendaks, et suhe  $s_1 - s_2$  on *ühildamatu suhe* — või puudub suhtel  $s_1 - s_2$  üldse mingi loogiline väärtus ja see tähendab mitte ainult seda, et ka kõik teised suhted tema ruudus pole loogilised, vaid ka seda, et liikmetele  $s_1$  ja  $s_2$  negatiivse väärtuse omistamine on täiesti mõttetu.

Nimetatud dilemma tuleneb Greimasi teooria aluspõhimõttest, mille kohaselt sõltub keeleline kommunikatsioon teatud tähenduse *süvatasandil* (ehk *olemusliku tasandil*) olemasolust, mis väidetavalt kõnelisele väljendusele eelneb. Kui me aga otsustame, et tähendused tekivad diskursiivsel tasandil, ning, sellest tulenevalt, et keeleliste koodide mallistumise protsess, mida võiks nimetada *semantilise seadmise protsessiks*, sünnib keelelisest tegevusest, dilemma kaob.

Nimetatud väide eeldab seda, et tähistamise elementaarstruktuur on sisuliselt analüütiku poolt üles tähendatud kõnelejate mõtetegevuse skeem. See tähendab ühtlasi kirjeldaja ja kõneleja positsioonide vahetumist. Siiski on need kaks tingimust, mis Greimasi hinnangul on tähenduse mõistmiseks vajalikud, endiselt olulised. Ainult et erinevalt sellest, mida arvas Greimas, rakenduvad nad nüüd kõne tasandil: kahte diskursuslikku ühikut on võimalik vastandada, kui nad mõlemad sisaldavad ühtaegu mingit ühist omandust, mis neid ühendab, ja mingit eristavat omadust, mis neid lahutab.

Nimetatud väite tõestamiseks analüüsitakse käesolevas artiklis kahte ameerika indiaanlaste müüti, mida omal ajal käsitles juba Lévi-Strauss. Analüüsi lõpuks tuuakse välja ka taoliste narratiivide tõlgendamisega kaasnevad spetsiifilised probleemid.

## How do histories of survival begin? The *incipit* as a strategic place of the inexpressible

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**Abstract.** I analyse here some histories of people who lived in concentration camps and told their experiences: De Gaulle Anthomioz (*La Traversée de la nuit*), Geoffroy (*Au temps des crématoires...*), Semprun (*L'Écriture ou la vie*). These histories represent the lives of survivors, but they are also a form of literary expression with a narrative structure that codifies a genre. More particularly, I focus the attention on the *incipit*, a strategic place in which some of the specific features of the global meaning and structural organization of the whole text can be seized. My hypothesis is that in histories of survival, already in the *incipit*, the authors strive to convey the emblematic value of their history: an extreme and traumatic experience which is difficult to express. The analysis of these *incipit* shows that experiences related to concentration camps, to be expressed, need an elaborated message and that an artistic aim can contribute to the representation of these experiences. From the structural viewpoint, histories of survival amplify a dichotomy existing in several literary genres and currents: 'external reference' and 'internal organization', mimetic 'truth' and narrative 'structure', 'reality' and 'convention', 'experience' and 'narration'. In my opinion, histories of survival solve these oppositions by reconciling some contraries through the use of oxymora. Even narratives structures or key figures such as the author, the narrator, the observer, the witness and so on, tend to become oxymora. The study of these features (and combination) is pertinent for anthropology (by seizing facts thanks to elaborated 'ways of uttering' authors often redefine forms of humanity) and for semiotics (any form of expression, even if original, has to be collectively shared and based on a system of signs). In my opinion, a joint semiotic and anthropological approach can help analysing histories of survival as a 'literary genre' and as a 'historical tragic phenomenon'.

*Raconter bien, ça veut dire : de façon à être entendus. On n'y parviendra pas sans un peu d'artifice. Suffisamment d'artifice pour que ça devienne de l'art !*

Jorge Semprun, *L'Écriture ou la vie*

## 1. Histories of survival as a narrative structure and genre

In this contribution, I will take into account histories of survival: more particularly, histories of those people who survived the Nazi concentration camps and told their experiences as witnesses to these tragic events. I will concentrate on the semiotic modalities according to which, in these histories, experience is codified (through the filter of memory) and becomes a written text. The semantic universe of histories of survival is often approached by scholars following two 'interpretative styles' which are apparently conflicting: either as a *referential message*, the analogue of reality that the uttering subject is supposed to record in a purely mimetic form; or as a *narrative system* that conveys reality thanks to the montage of his structuring elements. In the semiotic perspective that I adopt here, on the contrary, 'referent' and 'narration' are two intertwined components: historical reality is obviously undeniable, even though the textual reconstitution of this same reality can be rendered through multiple narrative shapes.

As a consequence, the semiotic approach is not to be seen as a sort of negation of those terrible events lived by witnesses (events which remain irrefutable and dramatic) or a refusal of the effective and implacable violence of genocide<sup>1</sup>, but as an attempt to seize, through textual analysis, the constitutive features that gather these texts and form this specific genre that is, in my opinion, camp literature. From the semiotic and anthropological viewpoint, the specificity of this genre is the result of the mixture of three fundamental elements: (1) the traumatic *experience* lived by the narrator-witness, which is in itself unseizable and volatile; (2) the chaotic and fragmentary universe of the *memory* that recovers, along the time, the event; (3) the

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<sup>1</sup> The question of negationism has already been approached, largely and by many scholars, in several publications. See, for example, Ternon 1999 and Coquio (ed.) 2003.



codification of events and its *communication* to the reader. One can say that, in its simpler form, this is a kind of communication that includes an addresser, a receiver and a message. Nevertheless, there is a greater complexity that depends on the semantic structure of the message and this complexity is based on the fact that experience and memory are impalpable and evanescent entities: they belong to the sensitive and cognitive dimensions, difficult to seize in themselves unless they are transformed into a text (written, filmed, drawn, painted, mimed, and so on) which 'contains' prototypically the constitutive semantic features of a specific genre.

In this contribution, starting from these preliminary considerations, I intend to focus the attention on the *incipit*, a strategic place in which some of the specific features of the global meaning and structural organization of the whole text can be seized. My hypothesis is that in histories of survival, already in the *incipit*, the authors strive to convey the emblematic value of their story: an extreme and traumatic experience which, if not inexpressible, is at least difficult to tell. The analysis of three *incipit*s will help to show not only the substantial differences existing between three authors, but also to reflect on some structural elements that these *incipit*s have in common.

## 2. The conciliation of contraries in the semantic universe of histories of survival

Histories of survival represent the experience and thoughts of those who lived in concentration camps, but they are also a form of literary expression with its thematic and figurative registers and with its cores of aesthetic constitutions: in a word, they are a real and true genre. In this specific genre, the *author function* plays a fundamental role. It is elaborated on the basis of a 'structural oxymoron' that associates the 'author of a text' and the 'subject of experience': on the one hand, we can find an 'author' who tries to cancel the traces of his presence (to say that better, the traces of the uttering author) to install the 'subject' himself who lived the traumatic experience and also to communicate the experience as exactly as it was felt; on the other, we see an author who reappears — voluntarily or involuntarily — in the shaping of the



complex stratification of the text<sup>2</sup>, a shaping and stratification that are sometimes very refined and show the 'artistic nature' of the message seeming in this way to evacuate its *referential function*. By this mechanism, a very subtle relationship is established between the sensitive material that constitutes the primordial 'substance' of these testimonies (that tend to manifest themselves as *referential stories* of events) and the *artistic system of signs* (anyhow conventional and upon which the uttering of the history of survival is built).

An example of the intertwining of the 'literary' and of the 'non-literary' (the 'artistic text' and of the 'testimonial document') is *L'Écriture ou la vie* by Jorge Semprun (1994)<sup>3</sup>. In this text, the subject of the traumatic experience who relives his past and tells his *life* in the camps (trying to convey what happened 'as exactly as it happened'), mingles with the author who makes an extremely refined *montage* of these events:

Il n'y a qu'à se laisser aller. La réalité est là, disponible. La parole aussi.

Pourtant, un doute me vient sur la possibilité de raconter. Non pas que l'expérience vécue soit indicible. Elle a été inévitable, ce qui est toute autre chose, on le comprendra aisément. Autre chose qui ne concerne pas la forme d'un récit possible, mais sa substance. Non pas son articulation, mais sa densité. Ne parviendront à cette substance, cette densité transparente que ceux qui sauront faire de leur témoignage un objet artistique, un espace de création. Ou de récréation. Seul l'artifice d'un récit maîtrisé parviendra à transmettre partiellement la vérité du témoignage. Mais ceci n'a rien d'exceptionnel : il est arrivé ainsi de toute les grandes expériences historiques. (Semprun 1994: 25-26)

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, White 2006 (and more particularly the chapter 6: 125-138) a work in which the author analyses *Se questo è un uomo* (Primo Levi 1963) and shows the poetic nature of the text, even though Levi tried to «manifest the scientific objectivity» of his writing.

<sup>3</sup> In 1943, Semprun was arrested by the Gestapo because he was a member of the French resistance. He was then sent to the concentration camp of Buchenwald as a political prisoner. He was kept in the camp until 1945. After his liberation he remained silent for years until when, in 1963, he publishes *Le Grand voyage*, his first 'testimony' telling his tragic experience. Dans *L'Écriture ou la vie*, written fifty years after he gained freedom, his intention was not only 'to tell the events' but 'to make people understand', by using literary devices, what really meant to live in the camps.

On the basis of a poetic device, Semprun elaborates a complex shaping of involuntary memory which is introduced in the narration in an intermittent, fragmentary and disorderly way: the minute fragments of memory relative to the detention in the camps (and sometimes preceding the life in the camps) are inserted in the linear course of narration (which starts textually from his liberation from the camp) in the form of small and loose notes. Each of these fragments of memory is recalled to mind thanks to meetings, objects, sounds, smells, looks, and whatever else can be attributed to the sphere of phenomenological experience. These 'mnemonic notes' find their musical echo in successive returns where they are recovered starting from the same linguistic *syntagms* previously used, sometimes with slight changes and with further developments or with gradual and progressive reformulations:

Le temps a passé, Halbwachs était mort. J'avais vécu là mort de Halbwachs.

Mais je ne voulais pas vivre la mort de ce Juif hongrois que je tenais dans mes bras, quelques mois plus tard, un jour d'avril 1945. Je supposais qu'il était hongrois, du moins. Son matricule en tout cas [...] laissait supposer qu'il faisait partie des convois de Juifs en provenance de Hongrie. (Semprun 1994: 63, my emphasis — L. T.)

Mais je ne veux pas vivre la mort de ce Juif anonyme, peut-être hongrois. Je le tiens dans mes bras, je lui parle doucement à l'oreille. (Semprun 1994: 66, my emphasis — L. T.)

In this way, a sort of repetitive symphony is created: an articulated cognitive *paradigm* of memory is shaded and gradually modulated by its projection on the narrative *syntagm*. This first shaping of free and involuntary memory is further complicated by an interplay of two different kinds of memory: the first one is older and relative to the detention in the concentration camps; the second one is more recent and rendered in the present by a narrator 'who says what he's seeing and who feels what he's uttering', a memory that refers to the period following his liberation<sup>4</sup>. In other terms, Semprun recomposes his past and recalls its traces spread in his memory through a subtle stylistic research. Nevertheless, this cannot be considered as a research of

<sup>4</sup> This more recent memory remains anyway a literary device since the liberation of Semprun dates back to 1945, while the author writes his text many years later, in 1994.

'aesthetic beauty', but rather a 'rhetorical effect', a specific strategy that the 'testimonial document' conveys through the balanced regulation of the power of uttering.

The co-occurrence of the figure of the author and of the figure of the witness is accompanied by another conciliation of contraries structurally inscribed in these texts: the 'personal vicissitudes' and the 'collective facts'. In effect, the author would like not only to cancel his 'literary' intrusion to leave the experience of the witness in the foreground, but he would also like to diminish the value of his *personal experience* to better represent the *whole community* who lived his same tragic events. An exemplary and extreme case of the co-presence of the single individual who dissolves himself into the community is the one represented in the volume *Au cœur du système concentrationnaire nazi* (Sachso 1982), in which the author, if it can be defined as such, is the community: more precisely the *Amicale* d'Oranienburg-Sachsenhausen abbreviated with the acronym Sachso. In this collective volume, 'truthfulness' passes through the voice of a collective figure represented by an association of survivors (the *Amicale*):

Au-delà de ce que chacun peut relater de son expérience personnelle, seul un ouvrage collectif comme celui-ci est susceptible, pensons-nous, de donner une approche globale de la réalité vécue par les Français. (Sachso 1982: 7)

In other words, the individual experience is effaced to the advantage of the experience of the community; the single individual voice — the voice of all the individuals who speak and tell the same facts — is effaced before the collective voice which is raised to the unison: a reiterated and obsessively repetitive *act of parole* that is apparently devoid of an author who, for this same reason, seems to acquire the *paradigmatic features* of 'impersonality', 'evidence of facts', 'objectivity' and of a 'real and true representation'.

This strategy leads to a third and extremely important question. The 'truthfulness' of the histories of survival is accompanied by a semantic of the non-possible and non-descriptive. The words used by the authors are various: 'inexpressible', 'unnamable', 'indescribable', 'unthinkable', 'unbelievable', 'unimaginable' (to refer to a term dear to Robert Antelme):

Comment nous résigner à ne pas tenter d'expliquer comment nous en étions venus là ? [...] Et cependant c'était impossible. À peine commençons-nous à raconter, que nous suffoquions. À nous-mêmes, ce que nous avions à dire commençait alors à nous paraître *inimaginable*. (Antelme 1948: 5)

In these lines, even though he uses opposing terms (to give up *vs* to try; to explain *vs* to experience; impossible *vs* possible; starting to tell *vs* to keep on telling; to say *vs* to suffocate; imaginable *vs* unimaginable), Antelme does not resign himself to silence and speaks in order to try to solve these semantic (and existential) conflicts. These few lines by Antelme are representative of a whole literary genre and give an idea of this new form of uttering created by authors of histories of survival. In effect, even though it does not reach the same semantic density, camp literature is written in oxymora in which the 'inexpressible is nothing more than what is effectively expressed'. The 'inexpressible' — the 'expressed that cannot be expressed', corresponding very often to the affirmation of powerlessly and thanks to which pass the (im)possibilities of language itself — is part of these semiotic modalities through which texts of survival are made.<sup>5</sup>

Before analysing the *incipit* of three authors, I briefly summarize the oppositions upon which lays the structural organization of histories of survival: (1) the 'non-literary code' and the 'literary code' (that is what is told as a *purely referential plot* of events and the *artistic component* of 'telling the truth'); (2) the co-presence of the *experiencing subject* and of the *author of the text* (3) the dissolution of classical frontiers between *personal identity* and *collective identity* and the constitution of a constant parallel between an *individual* (who is inscribed in the text with an ample gamut of emotions and recalling of facts) and the prototype of an entire *community* represented by an individual spokesman; (4) the emotional and cognitive *impossibility to express the experience* of horror and death and the infinite *expressive possibilities of language*. In my perspective, to analyse histories of survival means to concentrate above all in the new forms that the imbrications of these 'structural oxymora' take up: referential story

<sup>5</sup> On this subject Rinn affirms that «La pratique de l'indicible [est] l'expression d'une stratégie discursive. [...] cet indicible-là, en tant que *technè*, recherche l'adhésion du récepteur en textualisant un "impossible persuasif". [La] vérité ontologique [de la réalité] ne se qualifie pas à l'aide d'une hiérarchisation axiologique extérieure — objective —, mais en termes de *perfectionnement* d'une réalité subjective mise en scène» (Rinn 1998: 271, 272).



and artistic component, experience and narration, individual and community, impossibility to tell the inexpressible events and reiterated expression of these events.

### 3. The inexpressible as spectacles of the 'Self' and the 'Other' in *L'Écriture ou la vie*

The *incipit* of a literary text is a strategic place due to the fact that the foundations of developing the plot and building the characters are already laid, though in a seminal way, in this small part of the text that produces furthermore an inevitable rupture between the 'real world' and the 'fictional world'. The *incipit* of histories of survival take up an even more emblematic value since these texts are the report of a real event and characters are men and women who effectively lived the experiences they related. In these *incipit* one can find, in a succinct and condensed way, some central mechanisms of signification, important uttering strategies and the rhetorical devices used to introduce the reader into the spatial and temporal universe of the inexpressible, the centre of emotional and physical hell, the concentration camps, where the 'witness' was forced to live. In this sense, the *incipit* of *L'Écriture ou la vie* by Semprun is striking. In the first two lines, the author tries to communicate the feeling of abandonment and the feeling of loss that is characteristic of experiences concerning concentration camps:

Ils sont en face de moi, l'œil rond, et je me vois soudain dans ce regard d'effroi: leur épouvante. (Semprun 1994: 13)

The sense of loss and the sense of self-identification do not have their origin in the Self of the narrator, but both pass through the look of the Others. The common features of these two opposed movements regarding the meaning of identity are terror (*l'effroi*) and fear (*l'épouvante*). In a few lines, the narrator summarizes one of the most important questions for human beings: the definition of Self in conditions of extreme adversity and outside his possibilities. Notwithstanding the inconceivable conditions of existence in the camps, the affirmation of identity is realized here through the co-presence of the author with the "trois officiers, en uniforme britannique" (Semprun 1994: 14), in the look that concentrates on the detail of the round eye,



an eye that is reduced to two feelings: terror and fear. Due to the absence of the constitutive features that normally determine the sense of identity, the only anchorages remain volatile details and fleeting feelings. The Self (*je*) of the narrator disappears in the apparent confrontation with the officers (*ils*) in British uniforms and the sight of the Others is transformed into the levelling of the full presence and the presentation of a weak return to the Self.<sup>6</sup>

This text is so effective because it begins without a real beginning, because it gives some pieces of information on the identity of an individual through the representation of his annihilation. The narrator does not give any narrative anchorage concerning the events going on, he does not situate this representation temporally and spatially, but he restrains the narration to the foregrounding of a confrontation between the Self and the Other. This confrontation — which, according to the rules of the genre, is not a real confrontation since the people who are confronting the narrator are there to free him from prison — is in effect a disintegration of personal identity. It does not become, for this reason, a total affirmation of a collective identity. The only remaining way for the author to see himself is in the bewildered look of the Other. In this way, beginning and non-beginning, confrontation and liberation, representation and annihilation of identity are meeting in the form of narrative and structural oxymora. In these few lines, one can find a dialectics of the affirmation and refusal, the oxymora of presence-absence, the presentation and dissolution of a look that instead of being an instrument of knowledge becomes the only kind of observation of the Self.

In this *incipit*, some essential questions intermingle powerfully: to represent oneself without forgetting the others, representing oneself concretely even though survivors are physically and mentally unrecognisable, deprived of their identity. One can say that the absence (the “without” that is not always present grammatically) is a structural, latent element that takes on the most different shapes in the

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<sup>6</sup> This return on the Self through the look of the Other is recurrent in the text and used to define, in a transitive and reflexive way, the identity of the narrator. More particularly, the uncertain and suffered identity of the narrator is seized thanks to all different kinds of look and people. For example, the look of the officers in British uniforms is compared with the look of the narrator's friends in the concentration camps, Maurice Halbwachs while dying, the Germans soldiers and, even if paradoxical, tens of corpses.

narrative manifestation of *L'Écriture ou la vie* and, more generally, in the camp literature. This "without" is only a preposition, but it is an important preposition because it can indicate either imposition or indetermination<sup>7</sup>. 'Indetermination' can be considered positively as the core starting from which one defines the different realizations of the forms of humanity: all forms that are not hierarchically ordered, but equal without exceptions.

At the same time, the opposed pole, the 'imposition' of a form of humanity onto the others (and, as a radical consequence, 'extermination'), produces violence and injustice. This second conjugation of humanity is obviously to reject ideologically, but it is also to study anthropologically for the simple reason that it manifested itself historically defining some conditions of human resistance (in the concentration camps) and a negative idea of the principle of humanity. This anthropological reason (the definition of man in positive and in negative) has to be coupled with a semiotic reason and research: how can a narrative text represent the identity of a man who lived in inhuman condition? And how can a written text convey something that is belonging to the order of the inexpressible? If, more particularly, we refer to *L'écriture ou la vie*, the preposition "without" becomes a vaster narrative device: it does not only define a clear and strong opposition between the privation and the acquisition, the non-accomplishment and the accomplishment, but it represents the syntagmatic deployment of a process and a temporal becoming. This becoming is the becoming (of the identity) of the narrator-witness who passes through the corporeal breaking up and the mirror of the Other. The following scene illustrates this hypothesis:

Depuis deux ans, je vivais sans visage. Nul miroir, à Buchenwald. Je voyais mon corps, sa maigreur croissante, une fois par semaine, aux douches. Pas de visage, sur ce corps dérisoire. De la main, parfois, je frôlais une arcade sourcilière, des pommettes saillantes, le creux d'une joue. J'aurais pu me procurer un miroir, sans doute. On trouvait n'importe quoi au marché noir du camp, en échange de pain, de tabac, de margarine. Même de la tendresse, à l'occasion.

Mais je ne m'intéressais pas à ces détails. (Semprun 1994: 13)

<sup>7</sup> According to Coquio, the "spectre de l'humain passe [...] par ces deux pôles extrêmes: l'un positif et utopique, qui possibilise sans fin l'humanité à travers l'idée d'indétermination, l'autre négatif et historique, qui réalise sans fin l'inhumanité de l'extermination" (Coquio 1998: 385).

The "without" is present in the text grammatically, but its meaning is also manifest in the text as a narrative strategy that realizes more largely the sense of privation. It is thanks to this strategy that a close relationship is created between the flowing time and the thinness of the body of the narrator, between the 'totality' of the concept of identity and the 'details' which compose its figure. The privileged focus on the face of the narrator (compared to rest of the body), the face of the Other as a mirror, the mirror as an element of identity are all features which characterize this passage. The shaping of the textual form is very refined. On the one hand, the narrator focuses on the details of the body, on his fragmentation in parts; on the other, he says that he is not interested in details and that he does not want to get a mirror. Between the two first lines and this passage there is a strong difference. In the first two lines, the narrator does not give temporal and spatial indications, while in this passage he starts narrating what happened in Buchenwald, in the concentration camp.

If the reflex in the look of the Other is the effect of an event that is belonging to the order of the *inchoative*, in the following passage the 'life without face' of the narrator takes place in the *durative* of the years passed in Buchenwald. This *aspectual difference* between the inchoative of the beginning and the durative of the following passage opens a series of possible interpretations. For example, one can think of the narrator's desire to communicate the feeling of estrangement and displacement that the face of the Other produces every time on the narrator-witness. One can also advance the hypothesis that the opposition between the inchoative and durative tends to represent the impossibility to get used to fear and terror generated in the concentration camps. Did survivors get used to what was inconceivable and to what was unthinkable? More than a confirmation to an interpretive path, what is important here is Semprun's use of a refined narrative strategy which consists in a bipolar process: affirming and denying, aggregating and breaking up. If, for example, the look (onto the Other and from the Other) has an important place in this beautiful page by Semprun, the body also plays a central role, thanks to the sense of touch. The narrator says that he could have gotten a mirror, but he did not do it. He manifests the precise desire to see himself in the look of the Other: he wants the others to be a reflection of his situation. Furthermore, he is not interested in the details of his body or to look, by a mirror, to the changes of his body. Nevertheless, these changes

are attracting his attention and he is observing them through the sense of touch, a sense that is giving him an indirect perception of the corporeal process:

Je voyais mon corps, de plus en plus flou, sous la douche hebdomadaire. Amaigri mais vivant : le sang circulait encore, rien à craindre. Ça suffirait, ce corps amenuisé mais disponible, apte à une survie rêvée, bien que peu probable.

La preuve, d'ailleurs : je suis là. (Semprun 1994: 13)

The body, as an inseparable complement of the 'I', a natural completion of the identity, is blurred more and more, until it becomes a "flou", and starts living a life of its own ("amaigri mais vivant", "amenuisé mais disponible", "apte à ..."), as if it was a detached appendix isolated on purpose to underline the loss of identity. At the same time, this body reduced to an organ without soul is also the reaffirmation, even if weak and subdued, of some kind of survival: "une survie rêvée". This loss and reaffirmation of identity is revealed by a narration that foreshadows both an omnipresent subject and the presence of the others, the body of the subject and the look the others.

On the other hand, this implicit intention of the author is confirmed by the title of the first chapter of *L'Écriture ou la vie*, that is *Le regard*, a look that is declined according to different typologies (terrorized, scared, fraternal, disgusted, hated, etc.), each of them takes on a precise function for the shaping of the concept of identity:

Ainsi, paradoxalement, du moins à première et courte vue, le regard des miens, quand il leur en restait, pour fraternel qu'il fût — parce qu'il l'était, plutôt — me renvoyait à la mort. [...] Notre être était défini par cela : être avec l'autre dans la mort qui s'avancait. [...] Nous tous qui allions mourir avions choisi la fraternité de cette mort par goût de la liberté.

Voici ce que m'apprenait le regard de Maurice Halbwachs, agonisant.

Le regard des S.S., en revanche, chargé de haine inquiète, mortifère, me renvoyait à la vie. Au fou désir de durer, de survivre [...]

Mais aujourd'hui, en cette journée d'avril, [...] à quoi me renvoie-t-il, le regard horrifié, affolé, des trois officiers en uniforme britannique ?

À quelle horreur, à quelle folie ? (Semprun 1994: 39)

Car il n'y avait pas de survivant [...] Les regards étaient tournés vers nous [...] souvent au prix d'une violente torsion du cou. Des dizaines d'yeux exorbités nous avaient regardé passer.

Regardés sans nous voir.



Il n'y avait plus de survivants, dans cette baraque du Petit Camp. Les yeux grands ouverts, écarquillés sur l'horreur du monde, les regards dilatés, impénétrables, accusateurs, étaient des yeux éteints, des regards morts. (Semprun 1994: 41)

In practice, the indirect look is an adequate and necessary instrument for the acquisition of the knowledge of Self and Other. By the puzzle of the look and the intermittent memory (both privileged for the reconstruction of experience and situations lived in the camps), Semprun creates a sort of 'window' through which one can observe the horror that took place in the camps and through which the look of the implied reader passes. In this way, the difficult obstacle of the 'inexpressible' experience is overcome by Semprun thanks to the paved passage of the 'visible'. The possibility of the testimony is subjected to the verification of the look that takes on the function to make tangible what can be possibly said and expressed. The resulting hypothesis (that should be investigated in other histories of survival) is that the ellipsis of seeing entails an inevitable fall of the possibility to express (and say) the concentration camps and the survival. More generally, the whole semantic universe of histories of survival should be tested in order to see what are the relationships between the *discursive order* of the transitive look and the reflexive look, between the expressible and the inexpressible experience, between the seeing and the saying.

#### 4. Loss and reaffirmation of identity in *La Traversée de la nuit*

The analysis of the text written by Semprun has shown that an experience to be expressed needs an elaborated message whose artistic aim can contribute to the representation of this expression: the more the experience is inexpressible, the more we need a refined strategy; the more we want to communicate a deep feeling of estrangement, the more the inexpressible has to take an appropriate form. Nevertheless, if the expression of an identity passes in Semprun through the 'manufacture' of a look (and the breaking up of a body), it is also important to wonder how, more generally, life in concentration camps and the sense of identity of other authors are represented. Even though



the narrative strategy used by Semprun is powerful, experience in concentration camps is not limited to his 'model'. To show some differences, I have chosen the beginning of *La traversée de la nuit* de Geneviève De Gaulle Anthonioz (1998)<sup>8</sup>, a text in which an estrangement of the subject is underlined spatially and focusing on the over-coming of a frontier, which is represented by the door of a prison cell:

La porte s'est refermée lourdement. Je suis seule dans la nuit. À peine ai-je pu apercevoir les murs nus de la cellule. En tâtonnant je trouve le bat-flanc et sa couverture rugueuse et m'y allonge en essayant de renouer avec le rêve interrompu : tout à l'heure je marchais sur un chemin éclairé par la lune, une lumière si douce, si bienfaisante, et des voix m'appelaient. Soudain il n'y eut plus que le faisceau d'une lanterne, le visage effaré de notre chef de baraque, l'ordre rauque de me lever et l'ombre de deux SS. Cauchemar ou réalité ? Baty et Félicité, mes voisines de paillasse, se sont réveillées. Elles ont rassemblé quelques objets, dont mon quart et ma gamelle, m'ont aidée à descendre du châlit, m'ont embrassée. Quel sort m'attend ? Il arrive que les exécutions aient lieu ainsi de nuit.

Pour le moment, je suis dans un bâtiment à l'intérieur du camp de Ravensbrück, appelé bunker. C'est une prison qui sert aussi de cachot. (De Gaulle Anthonioz 1998: 9–10)

In this initial passage, the narrator stages, ever since the first instants of his narration, the loss of the subject before an incomprehensible reality characterized by the sudden sense of closure and the noisy door, the expression of solitude connected to the impossibility of seeing, the blinding light, the scared look of the chief, the soldiers similar to shadows in the night. These are altogether a series of elements that underline a cognitive loss in the subject. This feeling of loss is suggested (and even conveyed) to an astonished and disoriented reader who, at least initially, does not realize what is going on and what the character is doing and suffering. In effect, the narrator mixes

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<sup>8</sup> De Gaulle Anthonioz, young resistance member and nephew of De Gaulle, was arrested in 1943 in a library, in Paris, because she was carrying illegal identification cards. She will spend six months in a prison in Fresnes, before being transferred to the concentration camps of Compiègne and then, definitively, to the camps of Ravensbrück. There, after a year of suffering she was imprisoned in a bunker of the camp because Himmler wanted to use her to negotiate with De Gaulle. She was freed in 1945. In *La Traversée de la nuit*, De Gaulle Anthonioz chooses to tell only the last three months of her detention, those months spent in darkness and solitude.

ambiguously three different temporal and spatial events: the character being closed in the bunker, the indefiniteness of the situation deriving from a dream suddenly interrupted and the rapid awakening of the subject from sleep. The events follow a form of writing adjusted to the absurd experience, the temporal order is intentionally confusing and the different experiences are superimposed one onto the other in an estranging amalgam. Nevertheless, it is possible to get a logical order of events. If one positioned them on a temporal axis, there would be first the dream of the narrator, then the sudden entrance of the German soldiers in the barrack (where the narrator lives with the other female detainees) and, finally, the imprisonment and the solitude of the character in the bunker. The feeling of estrangement of the narrator is protracted until it mixes with the feeling of the reader: this device emphasizes the sense of loss of the Self and makes immediately perceptible (and absurd) the situation of the detainees in the camps.

Like the beginning by Semprun, the past is not proposed through the memory recalling events, but it is narrated as if it was lived and perceived in the present, in the same moment the 'witness' sees, feels and lives the facts. By this device, the figure of the 'narrator' is transformed into the figure of the 'observer' and the past is not anymore 'told', 'remembered', 'reconstructed', but it is described in a transparent manner. This rhetorical strategy allows to underline the 'truthfulness' of *saying* because the *volatile* experience is graved in an *indelible* way in the perception *hic et nunc* of the body and in the symmetric acknowledgment of the mind. According to Ricœur (2000: 731–747), this spontaneous evocation, this "presence of memory" is opposed to the difficult "search of memory" through which the memory is transformed into an image of something else that is no more existing and that, for this same reason, could be confused with a hallucination or, even worse, a pure fiction<sup>9</sup>. Far from being commemorative, the "presence of memory" is, on the contrary,

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<sup>9</sup> According to Ricœur, "la problématique de la mémoire s'engage dans la voie périlleuse de la similitude, de la *mimesis*, qu'on n'a jamais fini de dissocier d'un côté du fantasme et de l'autre de l'image-copie, sans que puisse être rompu, d'un côté ou de l'autre, le sentiment d'un lien d'adéquation, de convenance de l'image-souvenir à la chose souvenue [...]" (Ricœur 2000: 733).

belonging to a “declarative” order and it presupposes an act of trust on the part of those who listen.<sup>10</sup>

Like in *L'Écriture ou la vie* by Semprun, also in *La traversée de la nuit* by De Gaulle Anthonioz the reaffirmation of identity — threatened and weakened by the lack of points of references — passes through the body, although with a different modality compared to the one adopted by Semprun. In the case of De Gaulle Anthonioz, the subject becomes the perceptive receptacle of a negative synesthesia: the blinding light, the strong noise of the door slamming behind the prisoner's back, the staggering character, the bare walls, the roughness of the covers, the harshness of the voice contribute to create a melange of senses. Nevertheless, the loss of the Self is assimilated and strongly reconverted by the subject who suffers it through a surprising and unexpected mixture of dream and reality:

tout à l'heure je marchais sur un chemin éclairé par la lune, une lumière si douce, si bienfaisante, et des voix m'appelaient. (De Gaulle Anthonioz 1998: 9)

The negative experience of reality (to the point that it is lived as a “nightmare”) is compared to another virtual experience (it is virtual because it is only dreamed) which proposes again a similar synesthesia, but inverted, as in a play of embellishing mirrors that reflect the positive aspects of a nightmare (the possibility to see thanks to the moonlight, the sweetness of the light, the friendly voices) as if the *cognitive subject* wanted to affirm obstinately her own threatened identity and re-establish a *perceptive order*<sup>11</sup>.

This positive approach to life, constitutive of a strong personality, is anticipated by the title through the reference to the crossing of the night (*La traversée de la nuit*). The ‘crossing’ is a temporary state of

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<sup>10</sup> In effect, Ricœur writes: “C’est alors que se propose, à l’orée de l’entreprise qui de la mémoire conduira à l’histoire, un acte de confiance dans une expérience qu’on peut tenir pour l’expérience *princeps* dans ce domaine, l’expérience de la reconnaissance” (Ricœur 2000: 733).

<sup>11</sup> It is important to say that De Gaulle Anthonioz wrote this text in 1998 when she was 78, that is fifty years after her painful experience. Furthermore, the strength to overcome the negative effects of life is confirmed by the determination through which she faces every obstacle. For example, she fought for ten years in order to have a law adopted against poverty. She succeeded in having the law voted in 1998. In addition to this, for a long time she deeply engaged as a permanent voluntary member in a humanitarian movement.

imbalance that foresees a liquidation of this state and the acquisition of a positive state. A crossing is a spatial path including a beginning and an end. The *excipit* of the text coincides with the episode in which the main character gains her freedom from the concentration camp:

Nous échangeons un regard, nous n'osons nous parler encore, mais je lui tiens la main pour descendre les trois marches du bunker. Ensemble, encadrées des deux SS et de la surveillante, nous franchissons la porte du camp. Il y a encore de la neige, un vent glacé. J'essaie de me retourner et vois de loin les silhouettes courbées des femmes qui portent les lourds bidons de café. L'aube se lève à peine, c'est peut-être celle de l'espérance ? (De Gaulle Anthonioz 1998: 81–82)

This passage confirms once again the desire of the narrator to transform a negative experience in positive terms. As in a reflecting mirror, *La traversée de la nuit* opens and closes on the same, though inverted, elements. The conflicting situation of the beginning (the sudden and violent awakening and the isolation of the bunker) is dissolved in the *excipit* to the advantage of a quiet final scene in which the main character meets some other people with whom she finds mutual understanding and her internal world finds reconciliation with the surrounding external world. Giving up her feelings of estrangement and the fear to die, she welcomes an optimistic attitude and hopes for the future. In the end, a situation of order (the “three steps”, a “focus” on the subject) and a state of emotive peacefulness take over the cognitive loss of the subject and her perceptive disorder of the beginning (the negative synesthesia). Even though the final scene is still characterized by an absence of communication (“we dare *not yet* speak”), there is also evidence of other kinds of contact with other people and with the surrounding world: the hand of the fellow prisoner, the insistence on the comforting and exchanged look, the pleasant and reviving colour of the snow, the feeling of freshness coming from the blowing wind, the announcing brightness of dawn. All these elements can be seen both as a cognitive opening of the subject to the world and the rising hope of a new life. If in the *incipit* the subject crosses a spatial threshold that will isolate him from the rest of the world and place him in a narrow space of internal and external closing (the bunker, darkness, absence of contact with people), in the *excipit* the same subject crosses another threshold, opposed to the previous one, that takes him into an open and more



powerful space: the door of the concentration camp corresponding to the acquisition of freedom and the end of a nightmare.

### 5. Realism and historical truthfulness in *Au temps des crématoires...*

After the analysis of the *incipit* by Semprun and by De Gaulle Anthonioz, here it is important to take into account a very different one: the *incipit* of *Au temps des crématoires...* by Jean Geoffroy.<sup>12</sup> If in Semprun and in De Gaulle Anthonioz the situations were lived by the protagonists through a more *subjective dimension*, in Geoffroy the attempt is, on the contrary, to translate experiences in a more *objective dimension*. Both the author's intentions and the work's form point out a 'perspective of events' corresponding to a testimony of what the subject has lived and should be left as a trace of written memory:

Mon but est tout à fait modeste. Je n'ai pas même la prétention d'apporter la moindre contribution à l'histoire de cette tragique aventure.

Ce simple récit est destiné à mes camarades de Hradischko, aux familles de ceux qui ne sont pas revenus et à mes amis.

Je ne veux pas oublier. Pus tard, lorsque le temps aura fait son œuvre, je retrouverai quelques points de repère qui me permettront de me souvenir. (Geoffroy 2005: 8, Introduction)

In the introduction, the reader is informed that the 'discourse of truth' is the main purpose of the work: this truth is not connected to a 'scientific historical reconstruction', but it is based on a 'personal memory' that, for this reason, is even truer. The discourse of truth and the traces of memories to recover are seen jointly as the instruments to fix events.

This preoccupation for the "stabilisation of the material memory" (Assmann 1999: 277) is typical of man and culture and has to be investigated anthropologically in all its different declinations. From the semiotic viewpoint, it is also crucial to interrogate what are the

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<sup>12</sup> Jean Geoffroy was arrested in 1943 and deported first to Buchenwald, then to Flossenbürg and finally to Hradischko. Geoffroy was freed in 1945, but he wrote *Au temps des crématoires...* two years after, in 1947, "not to forget...", as written in the epigraph.



mechanisms that translate anthropological devices into concrete texts that, as a consequence, permit this stabilisation of memory. The close connections between anthropology and semiotics focus on some central questions. For example, where does memory place itself as a starting point in culture and texts? In which point of the temporal axis of experience can we insert the most important events to which the ensuing narrative material is hooked? As we have seen, the engraving of memory in the body and in immediate feelings is one of the most recurrent mechanisms used, among others, by Semprun and De Gaulle Anthonioz. In the case of Geoffroy, the possibility of stabilisation seems to be connected to the indispensable 'objective fixation of events' in space and time. This is why in *Au temps des crématoires...* begins with a precise foregrounding of the spatial and temporal context:

Le 7 août 1943, j'ai été arrêté par la Gestapo en gare d'Avignon. (Geoffroy 2005: 13)

There is no hint of subjective bewilderment, no trace of distorted or disoriented perception of events. There is not even a small evocation of the loss or recovery of identity. The reader has no element to get grasp of the horror existing in concentration camps. On the contrary, reality is manifested thanks to concrete points of temporal (day, month and year) and spatial (the Avignon train station) reference. The concrete anchorage and the clear positioning of some narrative facts remind some realist texts (Balzac, for example) or even some naturalist texts (Zola, for example). In this objective beginning, the different layers of reality and its natural development are analysed in a detached and rational way:

Avec quelques précautions, j'aurais pu éviter cette fois de me faire prendre. Les avertissements ne m'avaient pas manqué. Léon Arnaud, chef du Centre Téléphonique d'Avignon, m'avait tenu au courant des investigations auxquelles la Gestapo s'était livrée dans mes fiches de communications interurbaines. Je quittais Avignon, mais j'eus le tort d'y revenir dans la nuit du 6 au 7 août. J'attendais le train de Grenoble vers 3 heures du matin, lorsque je constatai brusquement qu'un cercle s'était formé autour de moi, un cercle composé de messieurs élégants, à l'allure sportive, vêtus de clair. (Geoffroy 2005: 13)

It is certain that this *incipit* is not containing a strong emotive charge. As a consequence, the reader is not 'modelled' in the same way it is in the *incipit* by Semprun or De Gaulle Anthonioz. In *Au temps des*

*crématoires*... by Geoffroy the reader is firmly anchored to a spatial and temporal dimension which is the outcome of a linear development of events. Nevertheless, this 'referential linearity' is tricky: the objectifying feature of the text is equally constructed by its author. The truthfulness of the story uttered by Geoffroy is the result of a complex figurative form that turns around the effective symbolic use of space. The narrator introduces, almost gradually, the reader into a universe of closure typical of concentration camps, starting from an initial narrowing of space ("un cercle s'était formé autour de moi"), a symbolic isolation that anticipates, as a sort of semantic prolepsis, some features (for example, a physical and emotional oppression) characterizing life in concentration camps. This first closure is underlined by the insistence of the narrator on a parallel series of similar spatial seclusions: "la petite guérite où se tient habituellement l'employé qui retire les billets", the "poste de garde", the "prison de la caserne", the "cellule n° 6", the "camion" that takes to the "train" and finally the concentration camp.

## 6. Conclusion

To show the complexity of histories of survival, I have underlined the centrality of a strategic place of texts: the *incipit*. I adopted a comparative perspective to stress similarities and differences in the *incipit* by Semprun, De Gaulle Anthonioz and Geoffroy. This perspective, both semiotic and anthropological, should be extended to other texts concerning histories of survival in order to extrapolate all theoretical outcomes out of this perspective. As a temporary conclusion, two points have to be briefly pointed out here.

Histories of survival amplify a dichotomy existing in several literary genres and currents: the categories of 'external reference' and 'internal organization'. Romanticism, Realism, Naturalism, Surrealism, etc., each of this current solves, in its own terms, this dichotomy based on mimetic 'truth' and on narrative 'structure', on 'reality' and 'convention', on 'experience' and 'narration'. My hypothesis is that histories of survival solve these oppositions by reconciling some contraries through the use of oxymora. Even narratives structures or key figures such as the author, the narrator, the observer, the witness and so on, tend to become oxymora.

The second question that I have outlined in this contribution concerns the forms of uttering through which histories of survival are recalled to mind and written. These forms of uttering are, in my opinion, new and characterize the genre of histories of survival. It is in this kind of 'literature' that one can remark the effort of authors to face some oppositions by combining structural oxymora and new ways of uttering the event. The study of these features (and combination) is pertinent for anthropology (by seizing facts thanks to elaborated 'ways of uttering' authors often redefine forms of humanity) and for semiotics (any form of expression, even if original, has to be collectively shared and based on a system of signs). In my opinion, a joint semiotic and anthropological approach can help to better analyse histories of survival as a 'literary genre' and as a 'cultural negative phenomenon'.

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**Как начинаются истории выживания:  
Начальные слова как стратегическое место для выражения  
невыразимого**

В статье анализируются истории людей, побывавших в концлагере: Де Голль Антониоз (*La Traversée de la nuit*), Жоффруа (*Au temps des crématoires...*) и Семпрун (*L'Écriture ou la vie*). Эти истории рассказывают о жизни выживших, но в то же время представляют и литературную форму, нарративная структура которой кодифицирует код самостоятельного жанра. Более детально я сосредотачиваюсь на введении — на стратегическом отрывке в тексте, в котором выявляются определенные черты общего значения и вся композиция текста. Я предполагаю, что в историях выживания авторы уже в начале стараются передать эмблематическую ценность своей истории: это пограничное и травматическое переживание, которое трудно выразить. Анализ выбранных введений показывает, что для выражения опыта концлагеря необходима определенная работа над формой выражения и художественные достоинства при передаче эти переживаний идут только на пользу. С точки зрения структуры произведения нарративы выживания расширяют уже существующие во многих литературных жанрах и течениях дихотомии: «внешняя референция» и «внутренняя организация», миметическая «правда» и нарративная «структура», «реальность» и «конвенция», «опыт» и «рассказ». По моему мнению, истории выживания решают эти противоречия, согласуя оппозиции с помощью оксюморона. Даже нарративные структуры и такие ключевые фигуры как автор, рассказчик, наблюдатель, свидетель и т.д. имеют склонность прератиться в оксюморон. Анализом названных составляющих (и их комбинаций) занимается как антропология так и семиотика. Антропология — поскольку авторы, осмысляя факты с помощью сложных способов высказывания, зачастую заново определяют понятие человечности. Семиотика — так как любой способ выражения, сколь бы он ни был оригинальным, всегда коллективен и основывается на какой-либо знаковой системе. Я считаю, что соединение антропологического и семиотического подхода позволяет анализировать истории выживания одновременно в качестве как «литературного жанра», так и «трагического события истории».

**Kuidas saavad alguse ellujäämislood:  
Avasõnad kui strateegiline koht väljendamatu väljendamiseks**

Analüüsin käesolevas artiklis paari koonduslaagris elanud ja hiljem oma kogemusest rääkinud inimese lugusid: De Gaulle Anthonioz (*La Tra-versée de la nuit*), Geoffroy (*Au temps des crématoires...*), Semprun (*L'Écriture ou la vie*). Need lood räägivad ellujääjate eludest, kuid samal ajal esindavad nad ka kirjandusvormi, mille narratiivne struktuur moodustab eraldi žanri koodi. Täpsemalt keskendun ma avasõnadele — strateegilisele lõigule tekstis, milles avalduvad teksti üldise tähenduse teatud jooned ja kogu teksti kompositsioon. Pakun välja, et ellujäämislugudes üritavad autorid juba avasõnadega edastada oma loo emblemaatilist väärtust: see on äärmuslik ja traumaatiline elamus, mida on raske väljendada. Valitud avalõikude analüüs näitab, et koonduslaagrielamuste väljendamiseks on vajalik teate sõnaosavus ning kunstilised kaalutlused tulevad nende kogemuste esitamisel ainult kasuks. Teose struktuuri seisukohast laiendavad ellujäämisnarratiivid paljudes kirjandusžanrides ja -vooludes juba eksisteerivaid dihhotoomiaid: “osutus” ja “sisemine organiseeritus”, mimeetiline “tõde” ja narratiivne “struktuur”, “reaalsus” ja “kokkuleppelisus”, “kogemus” ja “jutustus”. Minu arvates lahendavad ellujäämislood need vastuolud, lepitades vastaspoolused oksüümoroni kaudu. Isegi narratiivsetel struktuuridel ja sellistel võtmefiguuridel nagu autor, jutustaja, vaatleja, tunnistaja jne on kalduvus oksüümoroniks muutuda. Nimetatud elementide (ja nende kombinatsiooni) analüüs kuulub antropoloogia ja semiootika pädevusse. Antropoloogia valda, kuna keerukate väljendusmallide abil fakte mõtestades annavad autorid tihti inimlikkusele uue definitsiooni, ja semiootikasse, kuivõrd igasugune väljendusviis, ükskõik kui originaalne, on alati kollektiivne ning põhineb mingil märgisüsteemil. Arvan, et antropoloogilise ja semiootilise lähenemise ühendamise võimaldab ellujäämislugusid analüüsida üheaegselt nii “kirjandusžanri” kui “traagilise ajaloonähtusena”.



## The case of Robert Antelme

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**Abstract.** An analysis of the mnemonic mechanisms at work in the narrative of the concentration camp experience, based on the case of Robert Antelme. This survivor of the Buchenwald camp gave a first spoken version of what was to become his major work, *l'Espèce humaine* (*The Human Species*), to his friend Dionys Mascolo. Mascolo's testimony concerning the narrative that was told to him and his reception, some time later, of the written narrative (with the transition between the two versions marked by forgetting), question the notion of loss — in particular, the loss of a "0" text which is the text of death. This postulate allows us to explore the notion of the ineffable and to reveal its cultural implications; in other words, to approach the concept of survival as a narrative category.

There are two different approaches to survivor narratives. On the one hand, one may read them as literary texts constituting a sign system in relation to the referential world. On the other hand, one may also read them as testimony. In the latter case, survivor narratives amount to an object of anthropology of memory<sup>1</sup> as their main aim is to preserve a trace of the events<sup>2</sup>. The narrative of Antelme, the genesis of which we have precise knowledge about, opens a vast field of study dealing with the mechanics of handing down experience<sup>3</sup> as well as issues of its effacement<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Ricoeur 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Nora 1997.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Boursier 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Agamben 1998.

Robert Antelme, writer and resistance fighter, was arrested in 1944 and deported first to Buchenwald and then to Dachau (*Lignes* 21, 1994). On his liberation in 1945, he had the opportunity, of which others in the same situation were painfully deprived, of immediately describing his experience to the friend who had come to fetch him at the camp, Dionys Mascolo. These were, in a way, ideal conditions in which to produce testimony: the words spilled out freely, without any judicial, political or other sort of consideration, and they were received by a listener who was fully aware of the importance of his task and ready to offer his collaboration, insofar as it was possible, to create a lasting trace of the event by becoming a sort of co-witness. We have, in addition, the testimony given by Mascolo, the person who received this first spoken text, who was to be confronted with the problems of memory and forgetting experienced by the witnesses themselves. The literary document *L'Espèce Humaine* (*The Human Species*) would thus be coupled with a literary document concerning the genesis of this text, *Autour d'un effort de mémoire* (*On an effort of memory*) by Dionys Mascolo. This little book published in 1987 by Editions Maurice Nadeau allows us to investigate the blurred area which generally surrounds the genealogy of texts emerging from the experience of the concentration camps.

The spoken text elaborated by Robert Antelme immediately following his liberation prefigured, minus one episode, the written text of *L'Espèce humaine*. When, in 1947, Dionys Mascolo read the book, he recognised the spoken text and identified the one episode which had been added to the written version. This was the episode about sweeping the factory office (Antelme 1978: 56–57). Antelme, prisoner in the Buchenwald camp, weak and exhausted, was an unbearable sight for the young German employee who witnessed his desperate efforts to sweep the office. In the end, she grabbed the broom away from him and threw him out of the room.

Mascolo, however, does not tell us whether any part of the spoken text was omitted from the written version. For, although when he received the spoken narrative, he became its privileged and faithful guardian, no trace of the original remained when *L'Espèce humaine*, at the moment of publication, supplanted the spoken version. Forty years later, when he wrote his homage to Robert Antelme, his memory failed him: "[...] I am unable to retrieve the source of almost any of his words" (Mascolo 1987: 51).

Nevertheless, in a letter written to Mascolo, Antelme seems to say that he used the distance that separated him from the experience to make his selection:

I would like to tell you other things on this subject that seem important to me, but I realise that I run a serious risk: D. I think that I no longer know what can be said and what cannot be said. In hell we say everything, in fact that must be how we know it is hell; as far as I am concerned, this is mainly how it was revealed to me. In our world, however, we tend to choose, and I think that I no longer know how to choose. (Mascolo 1987: 14)

Antelme and Mascolo made the return trip to Paris together, during which Antelme described, in jumbled order, all of the episodes which had taken place during his period of detention.

I know however that I registered these words, as they were being told, and in such a way that I could have written down the essential points myself if it happened that he died; we knew this, both of us, at the moment. This was the reason for our reciprocal avidity, for him to make me see, for me to discover the unimaginable, and our complicity, against the backdrop of his possible death, which did not permit us to rest. To be silent, to sleep, these were things we could not do without committing a crime. (Mascolo 1987: 51)

We could say that Mascolo lent his memory to Antelme in the physiological and medical sense of the word. At a certain moment, he substituted himself for Antelme, immersing himself in his experience to the point of being capable of bearing testimony in his place. But at another moment, he had already forgotten it all. The words were inside him, but he could no longer unreel them, as if he had swallowed the text.

It is precisely because I know everything that I cannot retrieve the source of almost any of his words. I must therefore, in what follows, place my confidence above all in the images I have kept of what surrounded us, the scenes or events that served as the external environment of these words, like their décor. (Mascolo 1987: 51)

The spoken text flowed from Antelme's memory into Mascolo's. Mascolo possessed the reality of the camps in place of his friend. Then, he evacuated it. We cannot impute this forgetting to the passing years. The forgetting of the source by the person who witnessed its

outpouring dates from the era of the first reading of *L'Espèce humaine*. The episode that Mascolo remembered at that time was the one in which, during the death march from Buchenwald to Dachau, Antelme escaped from the column and was caught by some children. Why this episode rather than another? A wave of pity submerged the listener at this moment, writes Mascolo. For one instant, the listener ceased being the double of the witness, taking up his true place, that of an outside listener, through the filter of emotion.

As for the rest, I know only that, when I read it, I remembered that I had heard him tell it to me. (Mascolo 1987: 50)

In which moment was the spoken text evacuated? Visibly, at the moment of the discovery of the written text, it was already about to efface itself, for otherwise Mascolo would not have used the word "remember" which implies a re-memory, a rising to the surface of memory. The spoken text, first conscientiously registered, then entirely forgotten, rose to the surface once again at the moment of reading, both supplanted and resuscitated by the written word. Mascolo had appropriated the text so as to substitute himself for Antelme in the event of his death, for Antelme's survival was not yet certain. Memory functioned as a temporary graft; when the written text came into being, the body of the recipient was emptied. At the moment of transmission, Antelme was not yet a completely living person; he shared with those who had disappeared a knowledge immersed in oblivion. It was Antelme's potential death which gave the narrative its framework.

[...] For it's important for you to know, D., that during the first days when I was in my bed and when I talked to you, to you and to Marguerite especially, I was not a man of this earth. I insist on this fact which haunts me retrospectively. (Mascolo 1987: 92)

As long as Antelme remained a man not of this earth, Mascolo kept the text in his memory (*Lignes* 33: 210–211). If this text was no longer in his memory when Antelme showed that he had returned to life by putting his testimony into writing, it is because the spoken text no longer had a reason to exist. And, if Mascolo had forgotten a text that was of such importance to him, it is because it was not in his power to preserve it. The oral testimony emerged from the place of

death. By lending his memory to Antelme, Mascolo was able to join him in that place, which he had subsequently to leave in order to continue to live.

This is thus a text whose emergence takes place in immediate contact with death and with which the survivor must cut his ties. Once the danger of death has been averted and the return to life given form in writing, the first text plunges into oblivion, making room for a lasting document which no longer risks being lost.

What gives us the sense of something irretrievable in the written documents concerning the concentration camps, something which cannot be put into words, would thus be due to the effacement of a text prior to testimony, the text of death, and its definitive supplanting by the written word. It is not because the experience of the camps cannot be put into words, but because it can be done so all too completely, whether in a language limited to a dozen terms or in an epic narrative, that the loss of this first document endures as a kind of primal wound which leaves its mark on all subsequent testimonies. What we call ineffable in the experience of the camps would thus be a way of naming *a posteriori* this disappearance of the text, associated with the return to life:

But what about the ineffable experience of which they (the words) are the echo? It is not the experience of the camps, which is only the cause, a necessary one to be sure. [...] The ineffable to which these words refer is itself contained in words which the present speaker sees himself as the witness of. [...] here, uniquely, the ineffable designates not what he, now a witness, heard as told to him (he was told), but indeed what he in his emotion, actively heard himself being told : and told to others — or told to us. (Mascolo 1987: 12)

We should keep in mind that this notion of the ineffable relies on what I would call the apophatic *a priori*, a major premise of European culture according to which a primary object exists which cannot be captured in thought or language. The narrative of the camps, transmitted within a given culture, inevitably assimilates its mechanisms while at the same time modifying them. The notion of the ineffable or inexpressible is one of the tools used by our culture to inhabit its shadowy or inaccessible areas, postulated as ante-predicative or meta-predicative.



What Mascolo recounts in his late testimony concerning the conditions in which *L'Espèce Humaine* was written is the loss of this first version of the text, an oral "rough draft" destined to disappear for the very reason that it was inscribed in the witness's body, in that particular state still linked to death (Sofsky 1995: 250).

We can thus postulate that in his role of substitute witness, Mascolo, whether he wished it to be so or not, reproduced the conditions of the testimony's emergence and that it was the text itself and not an individual memory which dictated these conditions. The body of the survivor, from which and in which the witness's testimony unfolds, has the dual status of object of investigation and exhibit. The paradox of reproducing the reality of the concentration camps consists precisely in this: at the very moment when the necessary words come into being, the body which authenticates this reality is no longer that of the wordless subject to which the testimony refers. The body of the Survivor at the moment of the writing has regained the vitality which the prisoner, lying between life and death, lacked. In the case of Robert Antelme, the written word came into being within two bodies, that of Antelme, who lived through the experience, and that of Mascolo, who did not; a body lying between life and death and whose outcome — life or death — was uncertain, and another body belonging to a healthy man who had never experienced this state, but who absorbed the text which reproduced it, like a cassette tape or a sheet of paper, thus becoming a medium, the materiality of Antelme's spoken text. Mascolo tells us nothing, for example, about the difference in tone between the spoken narrative and the written one, which henceforth belongs to the realm of literature, nor does he tell us anything about the writing in and of itself, nor about the way in which it transforms the testimony, he speaks only of the way the different episodes fit together, of their architecture; never does he discuss the text's corporality. He knew nothing of this, no doubt, when he received the testimony, for the simple reason that it was his own body which served as the guarantee of this corporality. Without him, the narrative would have remained in a phantom state, or more precisely: as a phantom pain. Or, to formulate it differently, Mascolo himself was the body of the text. When the text acquired a different materiality, that of the written word, he was then quite naturally divested of it. What could have been perceived of as an appropriation was in fact only a step in the elaboration of the testimony and was no

more destined to “endure” than a single coat of paint amongst the successive coats of a painting elaborated with the glazing technique.

It is interesting to note that other Survivors of the camps were, in one way or another, threatened with the phenomenon of forgetting. Some would object to the term “threatened”, considering that forgetting, in this case, was the result of a mechanism of self-defence set in motion precisely by a logic of survival, and that it could be considered as a salvation. Indeed certain recent psychoanalytical studies (Rosenblum 2000) tend to show that the obsessional conversion of memory into narration does not necessarily imply a logic of salvation but can on the contrary rekindle the trauma. To write about the experience of the camps would thus be tantamount, in a way, to not surviving. The suicide of a number of former prisoners (Primo Levi, Piotr Rawicz, Bruno Bettelheim, Tadeusz Borowski, Jean Améry, Sarah Koffman) seems to support this tendency or, at least, to alert us. Nevertheless, according to the witnesses themselves, forgetting would have added to the unbearable trauma of the camps, one more loss in the series of losses borne during imprisonment, thus becoming a reactivation of the experience of the camps. Here is what another French survivor of Buchenwald, David Rousset, says on the subject:

When I recovered from the typhoid fever, I experienced a very difficult period. Of course, I did remember that I had been imprisoned in the Nazi prison camps. For other people, forgetting everything would have been a veritable liberation, but not for me. I had the terrible feeling of having lost something essential, something extraordinarily precious.

Then came the period of my convalescence. [...] By dint of eating heavy cream, milk and fresh eggs, my health returned. I gained nearly a kilo every day. And, little by little, my memory came back. It was an impressive phenomenon. Each day, a new section of my memory returned so that in the end I had gotten it all back, except — and I didn’t give a damn about that and still don’t — part of the time I spent in hospital that never came back to me and that has been completely erased from my mind. (Copferman 1991: 77)

The section of his memories which had been definitively forgotten, which does not seem to have much value for David Rousset, most probably corresponds to the moment of his passage from death to life, precisely this same moment of passage which similarly occupies Mascolo’s memories while subsequently being conspicuous by its absence, characterised by loss. Memory as it functions through words,

and which includes the category of anteriority, cannot be achieved other than through the materiality of a body which has returned to life. Rousset's testimony is extremely precise concerning this point : memory depends on the weight of the flesh growing back onto the muscles. What, then, does the memory of a person who is at the limit between life and death consist in? Although Mascolo does not say much about Antelme's spoken narrative, for the simple reason that he cannot be at the same time both inside and outside the narrative (he cannot "visualise" it, because he is its receptacle), it is nonetheless significant that he mentions that Antelme told the story in jumbled order. In other words, the spoken narrative was not organised into a temporality implying a sequence of events going from a "before" to an "afterwards", but instead all the episodes were treated in a disorganised manner or as if they had all happened at the same time, in any case, in a non-linear time-space. If we keep in mind the fact that in the testimonies of most of the survivors, the temporality of the concentration camp was assimilated into a sort of present tense without past or future, without depth or evolution, we can thus conclude that the first spoken narrative was oriented towards a temporal model different from ours which mimed the temporality of the concentration camps. This "disorder" showed not so much the chaotic aspect of memory but rather a specific organisation of time that was perceived, from our vantage point, as disorder. The passage from the spoken to the written word, the "translation" of the experience into the language of the living implied a conversion into the reader's temporality, a conversion which took place precisely in the act of writing. The linearity which permitted the narrative to unfold, to be orchestrated into sequences, could not take place until the body's corporality had been retrieved and, with it, all the spatio-temporal co-ordinates in which it moved. Forgetting, the momentary loss of memory of the camps, probably corresponded to the passage from one temporality to the other, from the spatialised present to the linearity of successive instants (Halbwachs 1968).

As for Mascolo, he had never experienced the degradation of the body. If forgetting was only dependent on physical functions, there was no reason for him to mime the survivor's experience in this way. This enables us to affirm that the forgetting which affected Mascolo's testimony was, in a certain way, programmed by the text itself; it was a physical function of the text. The surviving body superimposed itself

on the body of the text, with identical mechanisms taking place in each of them. What happened to Mascolo must also have happened to Antelme: he also forgot the first text. Indeed, the first text which contained the entire experience and adhered to it almost to the point of merging with it in an imperious desire to tell the story, together with other physical needs such as eating, drinking, and sleeping, could not be preserved in its principiality, for otherwise it would ensure the continuity of the very lack of differentiation which characterised the conscience of the concentration camp prisoners (Levi 1997).

This is what Antelme himself had to say about the first spoken narrative when *L'Espèce Humaine* was published:

Two years ago, during the first days following our return, we all, I believe, fell prey to a veritable delirium. We wanted to speak, to be heard at last. We were told that our physical appearance was already sufficiently eloquent. But we had just returned, we carried with us our memory, our living, breathing experience, and we had a frenetic desire to describe it as it had been. Yet, from the very first days, it seemed impossible for us to bridge the gap we discovered between the language available to us and this experience which, for most of us, we were still pursuing in our flesh. How could we resign ourselves to not trying to explain how we had gotten to this point? We were still there. And nevertheless it was impossible. No sooner had we begun to speak than we choked on the words. What we had to say began to seem *unimaginable* even to us. (Antelme 1947: 9)

We have seen elsewhere that the passage from one temporality to another implies a choice, and that even if Mascolo is unable to tell us anything about this choice, we can suppose that it was made in the act of writing. The first spoken text, in comparison with the written version, presents a kind of completeness, since we have been told that in hell everything could be said. From an act of speaking which includes everything we move to an act of writing filled with gaps, and at the same time, from the total solidarity of all the moments taken together, we move to a hierarchical organisation on the temporal axis. However, this “everything” that can be put into words is at the same time “nothing”, since at the moment of leaving the concentration camp, nothing has yet been said and, precisely, everything has yet to be said. The totality of the word in the concentration camp is a mute word, total because it is mute and mute because it is total. It suffers from a globality that is cured by the language of a man who, once he has returned to “normal” life, can finally bear testimony. We might as



well say that it is the metaphorical function of language that, in the concentration camps, is ill. The word is so close to the thing it designates that it is inextricable from it.<sup>5</sup>

The word "hell" used by Antelme is not a metaphor, it is "hell". The "everything can be said" of the camps implies that the gaps or incompleteness of language are not expressed: language thus loses one of its functions, which is to express its own insufficiency. The literature that emerged from the camps abounds in statements expressing the incapacity of words to describe the experience, statements that have justifiably given weight to the concept of the inexpressible. "This cannot be put into words": such is the leitmotiv running through innumerable testimonies about the camps. More generally, written and spoken language has the capacity to indicate the inadequacy of expression between what is experienced and how it is represented. However paradoxical it may seem, the ability to "say everything" supposes that the language of the camps, no matter how reduced it may be in the case of an exhausted prisoner, perfectly adheres to what it is trying to express and is thus wholly able to put the experience into words. (The more limited the language, the more significant is each sequence.)

When Antelme described his experience of the camps to Mascolo, he was no longer using this "total" language, because in the camps experience is not described, the events are not doubled by the spoken word but engraved in the body which alone is capable of reproducing them. We can nonetheless suppose that he attempted, in this first spoken version of the events, to represent that language. The pressure of the words makes us think that indeed something close to corporeal was taking place in the first moments following his liberation.

In his state of physical exhaustion, his only form of existence was through words. I didn't need to question him. He spoke about everything. Everything he had lived through for the past year, episode after episode, in no special order, each episode referring to another. To remain silent more than a few instants was impossible for him. He spoke in a continuous flow. Without hesitation, without commotion, as if under the pressure of a continuous source, possessed of the truly inexhaustible need to tell as much as he could before his possible death, and even death apparently had no importance for him other than this urgency to speak which its imminence imposed on him. I

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Foucault 1969.



think that we did not sleep more than four or five hours during the two days of the return trip. (Mascolo 1987: 49–50)

In conclusion, I would say that the fear of losing the testimony which forced Antelme to speak at the risk of his life, no doubt reveals a veritable loss in the passage from the experience to its representation. The concentration camp rendered after the event via its narrative conveys the idea (a kind of negative, infernal utopia) of an on-the-spot ontology, without recourse to the mediation of language. Something of this type of ontology can be seen in numerous accounts. However terrible the experience was, it nonetheless reveals a state of being which, on the verge of disappearing, can no longer be told and no longer needs to be told, attaining the self at the moment of the ultimate loss of self. As the space severed from the vast narrative of the world, the gaping yawn in the universal story, the camp itself cannot be described, in that the prisoner in his extreme state of existence no longer needs the personal narrative in order to communicate with his inner self. His inner self is directly accessible to him, and this accessibility is the very point at which he descends into death. It is probably this paradox that another Survivor, Primo Levi, tried to convey when he said that he had lived some of the most intense moments of his life in Auschwitz.

The Survivor moves away from this state of being, and his survival cannot be achieved except at this cost. By re-entering the narrative mechanisms that control our perception of the world, he returns to the living. The narrative leaves the body and organises itself on paper in ordered sequences of time rather than in blocks of speech which vie with the vital functions. What is at stake here, together with the biological phenomenon of the return to life, is *sur-vival* as a narrative category: regained life ceases to be the sole objective and is doubled by a narrative which superimposes itself upon it by pushing the pure sensation of existence into the zone of presupposition, not directly accessible by perception.

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### Случай Робера Антельма

Настоящая статья анализирует на примере Робера Антельма мнемонические механизмы, которые работают при рассказе об опыте жизни в концлагере. Робер Антельм выжил в Бухенвальде и первую версию о своих переживаниях (позже на этой основе была издана его главная книга «Род человеческий») он рассказал своему другу Дионису Маскало. Высказывания Маскало по поводу этого рассказа и своего отношения к описанному потом в книге (разницу в двух версиях можно характеризовать ключевым понятием забвение) ставят в фокус понятие потери — точнее, потери так называемого «нулевого текста», т.е. текста смерти. Подобное утверждение позволяет нам изучить понятие невыражаемого и выявить культурные импликации невыражаемости. Другими словами, таким образом становится возможным описать понятие выживания в качестве нарративной стратегии.

### Robert Antelme'i juhtum

Artikkel analüüsib Robert Antelme'i näitel mnemoonilisi mehhanisme, mis toimivad koonduslaagri kogemuse jutustamisel. Robert Antelme pääses eluga Buchenwaldi laagrist ning esimese versiooni tema läbielamistest, millest hiljem sai Antelme'i peateos *l'Espèce humaine* (*Inim-sugu*), esitas ta suulise jutustusena oma sõbrale Dionys Mascalole. Mascolo ütles selle loo kohta, mida talle jutustati, ning see, kuidas ta hiljem kirjutatud loo vastu võttis (nende kahe versiooni vahel toimunud muutuse võtmesõnaks on unustamine), seavad fookusesse kaotuse mõiste — täpsemalt nn “nullteksti”, st surmateksti kaotuse. Taoline väide annab meile võimaluse uurida väljendamatuse mõistet ning tuua esile väljendamatuse kultuurilised implikatsioonid, ehk teisisõnu saab selle läbi võimalikuks käsitleda ellujäämise mõistet kui narratiivset strateegiat.

## Naming the body of nobody: The topic of truth in Victor Klemperer's diaries

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**Abstract.** Victor Klemperer, German philologist and Professor at the University of Dresden, bears testimony to his survival during the Nazi years in his Diaries (1933–1945). Progressively excluded from all social life because of his Jewish religion, Klemperer is forced to recognize himself as a non-subject by the end of the war, calling himself “Nobody” in reference to Ulysses with Polyphemus, the Cyclops. Our article aims to show the mental — cognitive and corporal — process underlying this recognition. Our study will explore the two-pronged thrust of this process: faced with the inexorable destruction of his self, Klemperer has to acknowledge the limits of his analytical capacities. But this extreme experience will enable him to create somatic knowledge destined to recognize what he calls “thought of extinction”. To conclude, we show how this reasoning is based upon action language which consists in naming the body.

We shall try to show how the exceptional testimonial value of Victor Klemperer's Diaries (1933–1945) emerges from a formal analysis of his writing. A German citizen declared to be a Jew by the laws of Nuremberg, Victor Klemperer appropriates his writing as a philological investigation of what he calls the LTI (the *Lingua Tertii Imperii*), the language of the 3rd Reich invading the sphere of public and private life. Our study will center on how Klemperer develops over the years a rhetorical strategy designed to textualize an extreme experience. On the conceptual level, this strategy is based upon the

new formalization of the rhetorical category of the plausible: the topic of implausible truth.

We propose to develop two hypotheses: on the one hand, Klemperer tries to make his testimony credible by availing himself of the argumentative domain of ethos. In the rhetorical tradition, construction of a self-image (ethos) attempts to make the listeners trust the orator, highlighting his character, the sensible nature of his approach and the virtue from which he draws his inspiration. On the other hand, threatened by the Nazis' policy of annihilation, Klemperer will be forced to redefine the relation to self and others, modalizing a testimonial discourse which articulates the argumentative domain of pathos. If the discourse of ethos tends toward abstraction, giving rise to a philological reflection on the *LTl*, its counterpart in the domain of pathos proceeds by emotional concretion in order to situate the very place of destruction: the body.

### 1. Diaries of a non-subject

Victor Klemperer, who was born in 1881 in Landsberg and died in 1960 in Dresden, began keeping a journal in his youth, writing a chronicle of his life and times.<sup>1</sup> A philologist, a specialist in Romance languages renowned in the field of French literature, a professor at the universities of Munich, Dresden, Greifswald, Halle and, at the end of his career, at Humboldt University in East Berlin, he became a major witness to the Nazis' criminal policy (Mieder 2000; Jacobs 2000). Victor Klemperer was from a family of rabbis, and he converted to Protestantism at the age of twenty-two in order to make it clear that he fit into German culture. A firm conviction made him reject all incentives to flee the Hitlerian regime in spite of ever more threatening signs. He managed to survive this catastrophe, undergoing many ordeals in the process.

The object of our study is less the exceptional testimonial value of the Diaries which Victor Klemperer kept during the Nazi period

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<sup>1</sup> Among the 16,000 pages of manuscripts in the Dresden library, the following major works have been published: *Curriculum vitae. Erinnerungen 1881–1918* (Klemperer 1989); *Leben sammeln, nicht fragen wozu und warum. Tagebücher 1918–1932* (Klemperer 1996) and *So sitze ich denn zwischen allen Stühlen. Tagebücher 1945–1959* (Klemperer 1999a).



(Dirschauer 1997) than the shaping of his own language. Sometimes ironic and sarcastic, sometimes friendly and generous, but above all intentionally lucid vis-à-vis a self-image which appears to be irrevocably condemned, this total revelation is inspired both by a sense of duty to bear witness and by the spirit of the man of letters: this textualization of the limit consists in representing that which escapes immediate apprehension and assigning a linguistic place to an evolving thought process, particularly in the realm of modern art.<sup>2</sup>

Klemperer's Diaries thus seek to attribute a verbal form to an ever-elusive reality, defining a living condition whose entire social foundation is progressively undermined. This loss directly threatens the scriptorial act, not in its very materiality, as shown by the hundreds of notes, but in its capacity to refer to a world of established meaning. By established meaning we mean the semio-noetic background postulated, proven, and validated by the doxa, the meaning that is necessary for the development of a topic centered on the logico-discursive domain. Klemperer's Diaries bear the signs of his times which, from a cultural point of view, will always be — no matter what — ours, in his attempt to formulate that which finds infinite expression only in the representation of radical negativity — the Shoah — and in his appeal to silence, imposed by destruction itself.<sup>3</sup>

Klemperer also shows that the constant vacillation which marks his status as potential deportee corresponds to an organizing principle characterized by an inexorable logic of destruction. If the testimonial act records the elements necessary for the restoration of an individual present, guarantor of a form of existence, however precarious it may be, Klemperer cannot rid himself of the social, cultural and religious identity which defines him, according to the criteria established by the

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<sup>2</sup> Some passages in the Diaries are of considerable literary value, as seen in our analysis (Rinn 1999a). See also our article on the Hungarian writer Imre Kertész (Rinn 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Imre Kertész (1999: 88), Auschwitz survivor, draws the following conclusion: "But the conditions that made Auschwitz were already there, previously, in everyday life; otherwise, Auschwitz couldn't have existed. And knowledge of those conditions remains, precisely, our unfinished business. [...] How can I explain? There are quite simply, in each person's life, unclear areas. They must be swept under the carpet. If we don't come to terms with them, we end up having to deal with forces that surpass our strength".

Nazis, as a non-subject destined to be put to death.<sup>4</sup> Klemperer's journal is proof of the unbearable tension between the will to survive in the present of writing and the anticipation of his ultimate destiny.

## 2. Destruction of the self-image

The first hypothesis that we shall develop in this article, the implementation of writing, must be viewed as a procedure for the building of a self-image (which the rhetorical tradition calls *ethos*), with the aim of strengthening the credibility of the logico-discursive argumentation. However, Victor Klemperer will be unable to escape the role of non-subject inflicted upon him by the Nazis, in spite of the remarkable intellectual effort he makes in order to develop awareness of his situation. What is even worse is that his writing will become the theatre of a formidable conflict between the detailed analysis of the Nazis criminal policy on the one hand, and his quest for identity which will doggedly affirm that he belongs to German culture. For a long time, the journal will confirm Klemperer's choice to stay in Germany in spite of the Nazis, even if staying eventually becomes synonymous with the inability to remain detached from what is happening around him. Thus, in spite of his criticism, Klemperer will be all but incapable of escaping the machinery of genocidal logic, a fact having great significance for the media exposure given to genocide in our time.

The excerpts we have chosen will serve to illustrate the tragedy of conscious thought caught in its own trap. The following passage represents the culmination of an inner struggle which grows out of the narrative project to *go all the way* and its logical consequence, *the enactment* of extreme events, giving rise to the following question: to what extent can the act of writing create favorable conditions for the commission of a criminal act? It is the eve of the destruction of Dresden which took place on the night of February 13, 1945, in which the deaths numbered in the tens of thousands.

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<sup>4</sup> In our research on genocide narratives, we treated this social semiosis as an act of designation by means of which the S. S. speaker defines the category to which his victims belong (Rinn 1999b).

13<sup>th</sup> February [1945], Tuesday afternoon, perfect spring weather

(I) Odysseus in Polyphemus's cave. — Yesterday afternoon Neumark had me called over; I had to help him deliver letters this morning. I was quite unsuspecting. In the evening Berger was up here with me for a while, I told him, and he was annoyed and said, it'll be for digging trenches. I still did not grasp the seriousness of the threat. [...]

(II) For the first quarter of an hour my heart let me down completely, then later I was completely blunted, i.e. I made observations for my diary. The circular to be delivered stated that one had to present oneself at 3 Zeughausstrasse early on Friday morning, wearing working clothes and with hand luggage, which would have to be carried for a considerable distance, and with provisions for two to three day's travel. On this occasion there is to be no confiscation of property, furniture etc., the whole thing is explicitly no more than outside work duty — but is without exception regarded as a death march. The most cruel separations are taking place: Frau Eisenmann and Schorschi stay here, Lisel, the 11-year-old [girl] who wears the star, has to leave with father and Herbert. No allowance is made for old age or youth, not for 70 nor for 7 — what they mean by 'capable work' is quite incomprehensible. [...]

(III) Even more pitiful was Frau Bitterwolf in Struvestrasse. Again a shabby house; I was vainly studying the list of names in the entrance hall when a blonde, snub-nosed young woman with a pretty, well-looked-after little girl, perhaps four years old, appeared. Did a Frau Bitterwolf live here? She was Frau Bitterwolf. I had to give her an unpleasant message. She read the letter, she said several times, quite helplessly: 'What is to become of the child?', then signed silently with a pencil. Meanwhile the child pressed up against me, held out her teddy bear and, radiantly, cheerfully, declared: 'My teddy, my teddy, look !' The woman then went silently up the stairs with the child. Immediately afterwards I heard her weeping loudly. [...]

(IV) At Neumark's the whole office was crowded with those to be deported, I shook hands with Paul Lang, Reger, Lewinsky — 'You're coming too? No?' with that there was already a gulf between us. I went upstairs to the Eisenmanns for a moment, the whole family had assembled — extremely upset. I went to Waldmann, who remains here. He set forth the gloomiest hypothesis with very great certainty. [...] And we who remain behind, 'we have nothing more than a reprieve of perhaps a week. Then we'll be fetched out of our beds at six o'clock in the morning. And we'll end up just like the others.' I threw in: Why are they leaving such a small remnant here? And now, when they've got so little time? He: 'You'll see, I'll turn out to be right'. (Klemperer 2000: 493–495)

The passage recounts the last episode in the extermination of the Jews in Dresden. In February 1945, only a few dozen people remained from a community which included, according to the defining criteria established by the racial laws of Nuremberg, 4675 Jewish inhabitants in 1933. During the twelve previous years, from one deportation to the

next, section by section, and at an unforeseeable yet inexorable pace, this population was methodically decimated. Klemperer, both lucid observer of this process and its designated victim, had every reason to fear the worst. In previously recorded notes, he had long acknowledged, in his own handwriting, the meaning of the kind of *Arbeitseinsatz* to which the Jews would be called.

Thus, the first paragraph raises the question as to why Klemperer refuses to acknowledge that at this precise moment he is playing the role of messenger of death. According to our hypothesis, his very method of investigation, his approval of his own reasoning is what makes him blind. Unlike the episode in which Ulysses visits Polyphemus, the famous passage in *The Odyssey* to which he refers, here the weapon used in an attempt to deceive the Nazi Cyclops backfires on him. The act of writing, instead of enabling him to remain impartial in his evaluation of the Nazis' murderous logic, helps to seal his own fate and that which is reserved for the Jewish community.

In the second paragraph, an unbearable passage, the juxtaposition between apathy and testimony dramatizes the reversal of the ancient scenario. If Ulysses introduces himself to his jailer as "Nobody", a ruse that facilitates his survival and that of his companions, Klemperer is precisely forced to adopt the identity of "Nobody", a non-subject reduced to a state of radical passiveness and entirely abandoned to the mechanism of destruction, a role that enables him to return to the observation post, an indispensable condition for the writing of his Diaries. The next sequence shows Klemperer as he is drawn into the depths. In his role as messenger of death, but already incarnating "Nobody", he meets actual human beings, Frau Eisenmann, Schorschi, Lisl, Herbert, and Frau Stühler who, once they have signed the circular, will in turn be plunged into the anonymity of the human masses destined for extermination.

The most shocking scene is that of the little girl who, already deprived of her name, asks Klemperer to look at her teddy bear (III). But Klemperer can no longer answer her; in the eyes of "Nobody", this little girl is already doomed to death. Indeed, the written trace left by the messenger of death testifies to the unbearable violence used by the Nazi regime in its attempt to destroy a human community. But how can one reconcile redemptive writing with the fact of being the spokesman for Evil?



When Klemperer's task has been completed and he returns to the Jewish community office (IV), he becomes aware of the process that is taking place, the separation between those destined to be put to death in the near future, and those whose sentence has been deferred. But what escapes him and his unfortunate interlocutors is that their attempt to understand what is happening to them will always come up against the narrow limits imposed by Nazi logic. So long as the latter prevails, any kind of reasoning that tries to go beyond this incommensurable, radical Evil will be doomed to failure. Nonetheless, the remarkable quality of the Diaries consists in rigorously exploring this zone of impossible truth, ever trying to remain disengaged from the ultimate limit, up to the moment when the act of writing itself becomes instrumental in the production of nothingness.

The first part of the Diaries nonetheless shows that the mental gap between Nazi logic and the meaning Klemperer tries to assign it in everyday life defines his very writing project. Thus, the passage dated February 21, 1933, afternoon:

(I) Increasingly I fall back on reading aloud. Own work almost completely at a standstill. A review for the *Germ.-Rom. Literaturblatt*, that's all. I've put aside the 'Image of France' once again. Perhaps during the holidays. On the one hand I'm tortured by a lack of time: a drudge lighting stoves, washing up, shopping; on the other a sense of worthlessness. What difference does it make if I leave behind more or less one book! Vanitas...

(II) Lectures are coming to an end. Today is my last Tuesday because it's Carnival next week. For some while I've been reading the Italy course to four, five people. Monday the conclusion of the France course — next semester the lecture theatre will be even more gapingly empty. Things are throttled more and more.

(III) For something like three weeks now the depression of the reactionary government. I am not writing a history of the times here. But I shall nevertheless record my embitterment, greater than I would have imagined I was still capable of feeling. (Klemperer 1999b: 4)

Klemperer draws up a list of the elements that have created a strong feeling of gloom in him: his research is no longer progressing, housework is becoming a burden, and the number of students following his courses keeps shrinking. Rather than constituting the psychological self-portrait of a fatalist, this assessment gives particular meaning to the era in which he lived. Hitler has just been appointed chancellor — on January 30, 1933 — and he has not yet been granted full powers.



Klemperer is thus not yet a victim of the measures against Jews that he will subsequently relate in all their monstrosity. Nonetheless, his branch of teaching no longer suits the spirit of the times, for a new mentality had taken hold well before Hitler's takeover. Thus, considering the German original (I'm suffocating), one must interpret reference to the garrote as the manifestation of a *Kulturkampf* launched by the National-Socialist movement.

Therefore, the resentment felt by Klemperer does not stem from the fact that he feels personally threatened by the course of History, but from an ever greater questioning of German culture as he sees it. The journal thus becomes a weapon that he will use to prove over and over that he belongs to that culture. He will emerge as the victor in this inner struggle as long as he is able to explore the field of observation assigned to him. But, as we noted in the previous passage, once he is removed from his observation post, this weapon will backfire on him, leaving him at the mercy of Nazis' *Weltbild*.

Most of the journal occupies an intermediate position, however. In spite of the continual aggravation of his situation, Klemperer manages to view himself and his entourage with lucidity, which enables him to preserve a degree of independence — albeit relative — with respect to the ongoing extermination process. The description of his incarceration in the prison at the Dresden police station from June 23 to July 1, 1941 exemplifies this tendency. Entitled "Cell 89", the note begins with a recollection of the events that led to his conviction: an unboarded window at night, the reporting of this all in all minor incident, punishable by a mere warning and, finally, the sentencing to one week's imprisonment on account of the "J" on his identity card.

The sequences we have chosen form a part of the narrative that begins when Klemperer crosses the prison threshold:

Cell 89, 23<sup>rd</sup> June — 1<sup>st</sup> July 1941

(I) For a moment I thought: 'Cinema'. A huge rectangular hall; glass roof, six galleries with glass floors, as if to break the fall of trapeze artists, but behind all the bright transparency the uniform rows of dark spots, the handleless cell doors. [...]

(II) 'Undo your tie, unbutton your braces. Faster. In the time it takes you to remove your tie, I'd be completely undressed.' It did not sound excessively brutal, but the order was roughly given. Only now did I know I was not watching a film. 'How shall I hold up my trousers?' — 'With your hands. You can pull them tight somehow in your cell. Your briefcase. Nightshirt and

toothbrush you can keep, hairbrush is superfluous, books and spectacles stay here.' — 'But I was told...' — 'We make the rules here.' [...]

(III) How could I know beforehand, what imprisonment, what a cell is? Only at the second that the door fell shut, that the latch fell into place, did I know it with a nameless fear. [...]

(IV) I came out of the shock of the door shutting because of a loud, regular, continuous hammering sound above my head, tap-tap-tap-tap. I realized immediately: the prisoner above me is pacing his cell. [...] I had to break free of this idea of emptiness. The cell was my room, equipped with all that was necessary, I had only to study it in every detail. [...]

(V) War reports no doubt, the usual victories, the usual ridicule and abuse of enemies — of what interest was it to me in my cage? The excitement with which I normally waited for these reports was extinguished just as was the need to smoke. But now I clearly heard unintelligible, 'Deutschland über alles' and the Horst Wessel Song. So a big routine, a special announcement, some very big success. Only now did I think of the Russian campaign, which I had used to raise my spirits on the last Sunday at home — how dreadfully long ago that was. And all at once I was afraid the final victory could be Hitler's and with it his permanent rule. (Klemperer 1999b: 477–499)

In the first three passages (I–III), we can recognize a typical characteristic of the Diaries: describing the dispossession of his ability to comprehend the reality with which he is confronted, Klemperer tries to reconstitute the cognitive processes used to familiarize himself with the new situation. If he is still able to list the objects before his eyes, the staging of this situation escapes him and forces him to live in an unspeakable present. Deprived of the spectator's role that he has been compelled to adopt in order to preserve a certain form of existence, he becomes aware of the abyss opening before him.

The next sequence (IV) shows how Klemperer tries to restore meaning to this present. Placed in a position of radical inferiority with respect to the masters of the house, he begins to reconstruct a tangible reality, reassembling the known, identifiable, nameable elements. In the isolation of cell 89, Klemperer thus sets about reclaiming this limited zone. This act of sheer willpower fills several pages in the Diaries, revealing remarkable psychological and intellectual strength. But according to the theory that we have tried to explore in this essay, the density of this mental work is precisely what makes him forget that imprisonment is an integral part of the dehumanization process of which he is a victim. Paradoxically, by asserting himself he appears simultaneously to dispossess himself.

In the last paragraph (V), the intrusion of the outside world, crudely proclaiming the victory of the Hitlerians, brings Klemperer cruelly back to the reality surrounding him. Existential fear unmasks his mode of existence through a writing project conceived of as a philological construct that will have no influence on the course of events.

### 3. A semiotics of annihilation

Our second hypothesis, using pathos as a means for structuring argumentation, attempts to show how the presence of testimony responds to the absence of body. Writing thus helps to accredit the loss of his own corporality. The somatic invests the cognitive, carnal life touches social life, the *denotatum* invests the sign, the thing says the word. Victor Klemperer's Diaries show that in an extreme situation the rhetorical act can no longer deal with the domain of the plausible, but with that of truth — the destruction of one's own body, a process which seems implausible. Indeed, the state of non-subject will always remain beyond the reach of cognition.

As the following excerpts illustrate, words progressively lose their power of representation. From now on, the receptor must try to understand them literally. This reversal of the structure of meaning consists in systematically leveling the semantic categories that rule the conventional world of meaning.

10<sup>th</sup> August [1933], Thursday

A friend freed from a concentration camp. There, as a man who wears spectacles, he had to answer to the name "spectacle hound", he had to fetch his food bowl crawling on all fours if he wanted to eat any food. (Klemperer 1999b: 34)

In this passage, Klemperer relates the experience of a political prisoner imprisoned for an insignificant reason. The semantic transfer from the category of human animate concrete to that of animal animate concrete appears, however, to be a key element in the Nazis' strategy of progressively marginalizing a part of the German population as soon as they took power. If Klemperer complains of being more and more isolated during this same year, 1933, another way of expressing the first signs of the deterioration of his social situation, he uses a powerful metonymy to characterize the "leper"

status to which the openly racist Nazi policy has reduced him in 1938. This transfer of meaning from the human animate concrete to the natural inanimate concrete already foreshadows the measures that will progressively lead to the physical annihilation of the Jewish people.

13<sup>th</sup> January [1940], Saturday evening

The situation is made infinitely more difficult by the unsuspecting tomcat, whom we keep alive with almost the whole of our meat ration and for whom our moving out will be a death sentence. Eva is passionately fond of the poor creature, which is basically better off than we are. (Klemperer 1999b: 397)

Unlike the previous passage, this one shows a correspondence between the human and animal conditions in Klemperer's life. The domestic animal, recalling his former life, can be kept alive only at the expense of his master, on account of the food shortage among the Jewish population. In this passage we see how the procedures of meaning through concretion are intertwined with those that function by abstraction. As of 1940, Klemperer will experience ever greater difficulty in keeping himself at a distance from the policy of annihilation to which he is subjected as a designated non-subject. Thus we read:

30<sup>th</sup> August [1940], Saturday

I am now wearing the unfashionably tight trousers of a suit from about 1922, my carpet slippers are nearing their end, the situation with socks is very bad [...] [It] is impossible to see how I can continue to get by with respect to clothing. But we have strictly accustomed ourselves not to think beyond tomorrow. (Klemperer 1999b: 431)

The last clause shows how the body's foregrounding, responding to the imperative of physical survival, limits the procedures of cognition. In spite of impressive willpower, Klemperer will find it very difficult to venture beyond the spatio-temporal field dictated by the mere present. One might think that the reduction of intellectual faculties was an integral part of the Nazis' criminal strategy. Thus, one of the numerous official decrees which Klemperer mentioned in his Diaries: "It is to be emphasized that Jews are not allowed to store foodstuffs, but only to buy as they need for immediate consumption" (March 27, 1942; Klemperer 2000: 41). Accordingly, our second hypothesis holds that argumentation by means of pathos contributes to a kind of



knowledge that can be qualified only as somatic, bestowing complete meaning upon mere corporal presence.

19<sup>th</sup> June [1942], Friday forenoon

Until now I had found our situation *just as literally unimaginable*: I had always been told about being beaten and spat upon, of trembling at the sound of a car, at every ring at the door, of disappearing and not coming back again — I had not known it. Now I know it, now the dread is always inside me [...]. (Klemperer 2000: 100)

Using somatic knowledge, Klemperer is able to give meaning to linguistic concretion. As shown by the entry on July 2, 1942, he can now have recourse to a pathemic topology in appropriating his state of non-subject: "Hunger, which in the last few days has ceased to be in any way metaphorical" (Klemperer 2000: 110). The leveling of semantic categories, blocking conventional transfers of meaning between the known and the unknown, thus creates what Klemperer (note of July 5, 1942; Klemperer 2000: 114) calls "the thought of extinction". Paradoxically, this essentially somatic form of thought appears to lack a cognitive dimension: "we know nothing of the present, because we were there" (note of July 2, 1942; Klemperer 2000: 115). But the destruction of established semantic hierarchies makes it possible for him to define the place of annihilation — his body — as a place held in common, a shared place of habitation for the bodies doomed to annihilation. Viewed as a discursive *topos*, the place where all bodies intermingle is constitutive of meaning<sup>5</sup>.

The following passage which relates the final destruction of Dresden exemplifies this:

Piskowitz, 22<sup>nd</sup>–24<sup>th</sup> February [1945]

Fires were still burning in many of the buildings on the road above. At times, small and no more than a bundle of clothes, the dead were scattered across our path. The skull of one had been torn away, the top of the head was a dark red bowl. Once an arm lay there with a pale, quite fine hand, like a model made of wax such as one sees in barber's shop windows. Metal frames of destroyed vehicles, burnt-out sheds. Further from the centre some people had been able to save a few things, they pushed handcarts with bedding and the like or sat on boxes and bundles. Crowds streamed unceasingly between these islands, past the corpses and smashed vehicles, up and down the Elbe, a silent, agitated

<sup>5</sup> As Jacques Rancière has shown in *Malaise dans l'esthétique* (2004: 145–173), the concept of "indistinction" has an important political issue.



procession. Then we turned right towards the town again — I let Eva lead the way and do not know where. (Klemperer 2000: 500–501)

In the description of this confusion, one can note how the indistinction of semantic categories is precisely what enables the author to juxtapose animate and inanimate bodies indiscriminately. We can recognize here the fusional principle of Klemperer's pathemic argumentation. Confronted with an impossible choice on account of the inextricable mixture of bodies, he decides to blend in with the crowd of wandering bodies that invade Germany this spring of 1945.

### Conclusion

As we have seen, in spite of his remarkable background in the humanities, his mastery of philological methods and an unfailing analytical sense with respect to his own person, Victor Klemperer was unable to escape the Nazi doxa which he criticized so tenaciously. Those among us who see themselves as the distant successors of this Romance philologist will thus have every reason to fear the worst: the failure of their critical enterprise before the growing power of increasingly totalitarian information networks whose forerunner was the model put in place by the Nazi regime. To establish the meaning of the place of extermination is thus to carry out an ultimate act of resistance.

Reading the Diaries will also contribute, however, to the discovery of a more secret conversion, that of a human being reduced to the state of non-subject, of "Nobody", refusing to silence himself and to silence voices who have forever disappeared in the turmoil. Victor Klemperer — precisely by naming his body — will thus have infinitely surpassed the limit set by the Nazis. The validation of somatic knowledge makes it possible to break the link between monstration and signification, opening up the possibility of choices to the speaking subject. Thus, the mixing of the argumentative domains of ethos and pathos that characterizes Victor Klemperer's journal allows us to analyze the functioning of an action language whose esthetico-ethical importance in contemporary discourse merits further study.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Translated by Thomas Buckley, Université de Bretagne Occidentale.

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**Название тела никого:  
правда в дневниках Виктора Клемперера**

Немецкий филолог и профессор Дрезденского университета Виктор Клемперер описывает в своих дневниках свое выживание в период нацизма (1933–1945). Клемперера из-за его приверженности иудаизму последовательно выдворяли из общественной жизни, пока наконец, к концу войны ему не пришлось признать себя «не-субъектом», называя себя по примеру Одиссея «Никто». Цель моей статьи — показать ментальный (когнитивный и телесный) процесс этого узнавания. Анализируется двунаправленность этого процесса: оказавшись лицом к лицу со своим неизбежным уничтожением, Клемперер был вынужден признать ограниченность своих аналитических способностей. Но этот пограничный опыт позволяет ему дойти до соматического понимания идеи «вымирания». Настоящий текст демонстрирует рождение этой логики из языкового употребления, сосредоточенного на назывании тела.

**Eikellegi keha nimetamine:  
Tõde Victor Klempereri päevikutes**

Saksa filoloog ja Dresdeni Ülikooli professor Victor Klemperer kirjeldab oma ellujäämist natsismiperioodil oma päevikutes (1933–1945). Klempereri sunniti juudi usu tõttu järk-järgult taanduma kogu seltsielust, kuni viimaks, sõja lõpus tuli tal end tunnistada mitte-subjektiks, nimetades end Odüsseuse ja kükloop Polyphemuse loo eeskujul “Eikeegiks”. Minu artikli eesmärgiks on näidata selle äratundmise mentaalset — kognitiivset ja kehalist — protsessi. Minu analüüs jälgib selle protsessi kaheharulisust: seistes vastamisi enda vältimatu hävinguga, tuleb Klempereril tunnistada oma analüütiliste võimete piiratust. Kuid see äärmuslik kogemus lubab tal jõuda “väljasuremisidee” somaatilise mõistmiseni. Käesolev tekst demonstreerib seda, kuidas see loogika sündis keha nimetamisele keskenduvast verbilisest keelekasutusest.

## **Critical events of the 1940s in Estonian life histories**

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**Abstract.** The article observes how critical times, conditioned by events concurrent with Soviet power and World War II, are currently reflected in life histories of newly independent Estonia. Oral history analysis comprises texts from southern Läänemaa: oral life history interview (2005), written responses to the Estonian National Museum's questionnaire "The 1949 Deportation, Life as a Deportee" (1999) and a written life history sent to the Estonian Literary Museum's relevant competition "One Hundred Lives of a Century" (1999). Aiming at historic context, materials from the Estonian Historical Archives and Läänemaa County Archives have been used. The treatment focuses on two issues. First, whether oral and written narratives only differ by the form of presentation or do they also convey different messages (ideologies). Secondly, whether memories and history documents solely complement each other or do they more essentially alter the imaginations obtained from the events. The public is presented with experience narratives on coping under difficult circumstances, both at practical and mental levels. Narratives are presented from a certain standpoint, pursuant to narrators' convictions, with the main message remaining the same in different presentations. The addition of history sources enables to better observe the evolving of narrative tradition (narration rules) and highlight new questions (hidden in the narrative).

The history of 20th century Europe is characterised by the intervention of aggressive politics into everyday life. Regarding life history narratives, this brings about the interweaving of the narrator's personal life events with these of historical ones. Analogously, Alessandro Portelli, a researcher of Italian oral history, writes: "War keeps coming back in narratives and memories as the most dramatic point of encounter between the personal and public, between biography and history"

(Portelli 1997: ix). At the same time, it is impossible to phrase absolute criteria to be used for deciding upon the criticality of a historical period, based on the personal narrative. The qualities attributed to the time are revealed in comparison with other "times".

### **Research background: problems, subject matter, sources**

The current article focuses on the depiction of the 1940s in Estonian life history narratives,<sup>1</sup> where the subject matters gyre around the imposing of Soviet power, events of World War II and repressions. Criteria of criticality in these narratives comprise extreme situations in personal life associated with political changes, expressed in conflicts between personal wishes and forced choices, and also in the loss of close people and one's home, deportation, imprisonment and interrogation situations. Currently, the "post-war years are being prevailingly described through traumatic experience" conveyed by the mentality of the pre-war time (i.e. the time of independent Estonia) (Hinrikus 2003: 198). The critical nature of this period is being experienced not only as personal but concerning the fate of the whole nation. However, when adding the Russian-language narratives to the Estonian ones, it becomes evident that different ethnic groups in Estonia may sporadically perceive and interpret the events of the 1940s in a contradictory manner (Jaago 2004: 179–181).

Why do Estonian narrators focus on the critical period of the 1940s? Rutt Hinrikus (2003) highlights a couple of important aspects. First, the suitability of dramatic events for the creation of narratives as

the history of dramatic experiences mostly contains a complete story, including the exposition as well as culmination(s) and exotic details which are never existent in peaceful and monotonous everyday life. (Hinrikus 2003: 191)

To this, Hinrikus adds a psychological need to reminisce. In addition to the above-mentioned, I emphasise the impact of the quality regarding the time of narration on the choices as to what periods of

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<sup>1</sup> Regarding the research on Estonian life history narratives, see Kirss *et al.* 2004.



history people prefer to talk about.<sup>2</sup> The 1990s were a pivotal period in Estonia where history was rendered rethought from a new standpoint. Historic events of the 20th century have offered plenty of opportunities to experience that relationships between people do change on the boundary of stable and critical times. This has induced discussion on behavioural preferences and norms, by way of analysing concrete situations. The subject matters, referring to analogous earlier situations, become actualised in the framework of the discussions.

The narrators of the life stories used in the article were born in the 1920s. Their childhood passed in a stable society. By the dawn of pivotal times in 1940 they had become adolescents. Their parents, born at the beginning of the century, had been in contact, to a smaller a greater extent, with revolutions and wars.<sup>3</sup> The grandparents of the narrators had lived in the "tsarist time" (also "manor time", "serfdom time"), revealed in the narratives by way of social confrontations rather than those deriving from power conflicts. The experiences, obtained within the family and kinship relationships, are amalgamated in the narratives regarding the 1940s, intermittently in opposing and supportive ways.

All the analysed life history narratives originate from the same area in West-Estonia. The examples have been received by three different archives during 1999–2005. Firstly, author's fieldwork materials located in the Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore of the University of Tartu. Secondly, the written life history narratives in the Estonian Literary Museum.<sup>4</sup> The third source comprises the written responses to the thematic questionnaires compiled in the Estonian National Museum.<sup>5</sup> Upon creating the context, history documents from the Estonian Historical Archives and the Läänemaa County Archives have been used.

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<sup>2</sup> The prerequisite for narration is the existence of the *impetuses for remembrance* (Tulving 1994: 68). Real life stories are being designed proceeding from the time and goals of narrating: although the events remain to be what they were, they are attributed certain meanings during the narration process, proceeding from the time of narrating and the impetuses of remembering.

1905–1907 and 1917 revolutions, World War I 1914–1918, War of Independence 1918–1920.

<sup>4</sup> Regarding "Estonian Life Histories" collection, see Hinrikus, Kõresaar 2004.

<sup>5</sup> (Electronically published) questionnaires of the Estonian National Museum: [www.erm.ee/?lang=EST&node=58](http://www.erm.ee/?lang=EST&node=58).

The following treatment has proceeded from oral history-related research opportunities. In Estonian research tradition, I refer to this domain as *popular narrated history* (*pärimuslik ajalugu*), which, in its wider sense, is related to oral history.<sup>6</sup> Popular narrated history is a research direction that was developed in Estonian folkloristics in the 1990s, relying, on one hand, on the internal regeneration of the particular discipline since the 1970s and, on the other hand, on the change of society at the end of the century. Within the science, this primarily means an interest in contemporary folklore which positioned itself next to the research of classical types (these of the past) of folklore (e.g., the works by Linda Dégh, Jan Harold Brunvand, Bengt Klintberg and Leea Virtanen; in Estonia, the works by Mare Kõiva and Eda Kalmre). At the same time, the disciplines of humanities and social sciences were converging, incl. the highlighting of interdisciplinarity in the 1990s (cf. Brednich 1998 [1990]: 8–13; Thompson 2000: xi–xii). In Estonian folkloristics, this purported delving into the research method proceeding from the folklore group, counterbalancing the text-centred research of folklore, predominant in Soviet folkloristics (cf. Ivanova 1994). In the case of the latter, it was preferably the opportunities of literary science that were utilised or instead, folklore was primarily related to literary texts — this is also characteristic of the analysis of texts that reflect real-life events, as, for instance, the treatment on the songs and folk narratives of the 1877–1878 Russian-Turkish War (Rüütel 1977; Hiiemäe 2000 [1977]) or that of the revolutionary songs (Tampere 1970).

Side by side with the developments inside the scientific discipline itself, the elaboration regarding the research method of narrated history was also affected by historical-political developments in society (first and foremost, the collapse of the Soviet Union) which activated the disputes on various treatments of the past. The research of narrated history, evolved in the 1990s in Estonia, has indeed been servicing the ascertaining of different interpretations of the past. Nevertheless, this is not a discipline of history (differently from oral history) as the study of narrated history proceeds from narrating, intrinsic of folk tradition, and methods of folkloristics. The “route” of oral history is just the opposite: when creating the source of

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<sup>6</sup> For comparative research overview of oral history (popular narrated history) in Estonia, Finland, Latvia and northeast Russia, see online folkloristics journal *ELORE* 1/2006, <http://cc.joensuu.fi/~loristi>.

research — oral history interview — it is the events of history that are the starting points, and, as a rule, the interviewer as one of the creators of oral history is a historian by profession (Grele 2000 [1998]: 42–43).

The researcher of narrated history does not focus on the classical history-related question as to “what happened” but instead, on how the narrator, in his or her story, presents the impact of the past events and situations on the period of time that remains between the narrated event and the time of narrating.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, folkloristics has been determinedly studying the connections between the real-life based narratives with the stories existing prior to the event – folk tradition, i.e. the narrative is created as an outcome of cooperation between real life experience and the existent means of expression (narrative tradition) (see, e.g., Hiimäe 1978: 62–67; Nekljudov 1998).

The connection between history and folklore has been obvious from the very beginning of this branch of science. Regarding the development of this relationship, Peter Burke differentiates between three stages: the age of harmony (1846–1920s) characterised by “popular antiquities”, one of the denominations of folklore, establishment of (national) museums and dealing with the domains official history was not paying attention to (such subject matters as the state and religion); the age of suspicion (1920s–1970s), characterised by the sharpening of the boundaries between the disciplines of science and also the specialisation of research branches; and the age of rapprochement (since the 1970s), exemplified by interest towards local history, popular culture and the so-called “history from below” in the disciplines of history, and, in folkloristics, towards socio-cultural processes (Burke 2004; cf. Thompson 2000 [1978]: 71–81). According to the periodisation by Burke, it is possible to see the following events in Estonia. In the middle of the 19th century, Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald wrote about historical legend as one of many possible sources to study the past (Kreutzwald 1844). History “through the eyes of the people” was also the principal idea of the folklore programme for Jakob Hurt, the organiser of large-scale folklore collections, whereas in the sense of “folklore”, he used the concept “folk memories” (cf. the above-mentioned “popular anti-

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<sup>7</sup> Regarding the unity of the past, present and future time in folklore texts, see, e.g. Gerndt 1986 [1981]: 38.

quities") (Jaago 2005: 46–52). This direction of folklore research became topical again in the 1920s and 1930s, but really, differently from contemporary study the approach described above was discipline-centred (Jaago 2002).

The study of narrated history, or folkloristics oral history in Estonia, is characterised by simultaneous use of different types of sources: both oral interviews as well as written recordings thereof, written thematic narratives which in turn were created both spontaneously (for one's own family and descendants) and as responses to the calls by archives (Estonian Literary Museum, Estonian National Museum, National Archives of Estonia). Regarding the study of narrated history, preference is given to the narratives where the participation of the researcher (interviewer) is minimal. In addition to this, classical history documents and other public texts (research on history, media texts, school textbooks) are being used. Indeed, the study does proceed from the narrative, however, one source is not preferred to another: the issue is in the comparison of different viewpoints and angles, rather than finding the so-called truth. The narrator's viewpoint is positioned in a relationship with other texts and the results are analysed within the historical context in order to ask as to why the studied narrative (or a viewpoint) could be namely the way it is. For instance, the study of kinship history by way of mutually comparing the family folklore and documents of history, the aim of which, differently from genealogy, is not to ascertain the "proper" history but rather in finding the social and cultural factors that affect the emergence and evolving of knowledge existent in family folklore (Jaago, Jaago 1996).

In the current article the focus is on two issues. First, whether oral and written narratives only differ by the form of presentation or do they also convey different messages (ideologies<sup>8</sup>). Secondly, whether the sources from different archives solely complement each other or do they alter the imaginations obtained from the events in a more essential manner. Both the above-mentioned main issues are in turn permeated by an axis: how are the time of the events and the time of narration interrelated?

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<sup>8</sup> In Estonian life history research, Ene Kõresaar (2005) uses the concept "ideology of life" so as to describe the system and logic of narrators' interpretation of the past.



**“Confluence of times”:  
reality, remembering and narrating**

In the following subsection, I will introduce the two somewhat contradictory opportunities for depicting the coherence of times within an interview. Firstly, how are the flows of times being related in a narrative once the earlier “times” start to reduce in the memory? Secondly, how, due to the similarity of personal life experience and that of the parents, are relevant “times” also being related in the narrative?

Recording of the interview in question took place in connection with a more lengthy work when I was looking for data about Madli Kindel, a folk singer from Läänemaa. Her songs had been written down in 1889. Differently from other folk singers whose song texts were written down at the time, there was no genealogical data available about her in the Historical Archives. The reason for dealing with this subject matter proceeded from the research on the socio-economic context of the persistence and alteration of Estonian old folk song tradition. In summer 2005, I went to the villages where the studied folk songs had been written down. During the past 117 years, the consistency of settlement had significantly altered and I did not expect to find the descendants of the then folk singers. Nevertheless: Jaan Kindel was one of the indigenous inhabitants in the locality – he had the same family name as the singer I was interested in and I asked him whether he knew Madli. The man responded: “Yes, Madli is my grandmother. She was so old that she even wasn’t deported!”<sup>9</sup> Such a reply surprised me for two reasons: on one hand, consistency of the folk singer’s family indeed existed in the same locality (true, in a neighbouring village). On the other hand, the second half of the sentence — “she was so old that she even wasn’t deported”. Deportation is the subject matter which is abundantly talked about both now as well as during this fieldwork to southern Läänemaa in August 2005.<sup>10</sup> Tape recording of the conversation with Jaan Kindel and his wife Laine also twists around the issue of deportation,

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<sup>9</sup> On March 25, 1949, approximately 23,000 inhabitants were sent from Estonia to Russia by the Soviet power (Rahi 2004: II 16). Narrator’s grandmother Madli Kindel (b. 1861) is in the list of those to be deported, however, with a note “not deported” (Õispuu 1999: 188).

<sup>10</sup> Fieldwork materials are located in the Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore, University of Tartu (MK: Läänemaa 2005).



although my questions were related to family and genealogical history.<sup>11</sup>

Jaan talked about the origin of his grandmother. When comparing the obtained oral data with the documents of the Historical Archives, it became evident that what I heard from Jaan about his grandmother Madli was actually partially associated with Madli's parents: in the family history narrative, the time of two generations had merged into one. When I asked whether Jaan remembered his grandmother's stories and songs, he said his grandmother used to talk about hard work for the landlord. This is intrinsic of family tradition to know the 19th century by way of narratives on hard physical labour. The 20th century narratives, on the other hand, turn around the impact of political events. In family narratives, these periods are revealed as times with a different quality, offering the then and current narrators a whole spectrum of totally different experiences. In 1949, Jaan Kindel was taken to Siberia from his ancestors' farm and he could not return to his home any more. "My father's home was rebuilt into a kolkhoz grain drier, working at full speed: Thus my family could not stay there," Jaan described the situation when he returned from deportation in 1959.<sup>12</sup> The narrator distances himself from his ancestors due to the difference in life experience and the loss of their common home. "Confluence of times" in the narrative is connected to the dispersion of facts as what has been heard from the older generations has become passive tradition.

The next example from the same interview, however, discloses a contradictory tendency: experiential narrative heard from parents becomes actualised due to reoccurrence of a similar situation. Conversation continued to focus on kinship and family history, with the narratives reaching the time of World War I (1914–1918). Jaan described this period by way of hard work and lack of food. His wife Laine took over with a phrase "yes, the times were very difficult also for our family". She talked about the war-time hunger experience of her mother and aunt: eating brick crumbles; finishing the jar of honey meant for the mother in her sickbed: children knew that is was forbidden, but they were so hungry. These are episodes with well-elaborated imagery language where difficulties conditioned by historic

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<sup>11</sup> Recording is in the Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore, University of Tartu (MK: Läänemaa 2005, CD-2).

<sup>12</sup> Estonian National Museum (ERM), KV 874, p. 188 (1999).

events (children's hunger), family destinies (heavy illness of the mother of children) and characters (strict father but still capable of understanding children) become intertwined. Suddenly the narrator's voice broke. She made pauses to keep back the tears, said single phrases: "it was a difficult time...", "that's what mother used to say...", "it was as if in Siberia...", "mother and I were eating couch grass...", "there was nothing to eat..." These couple of phrases reveal that narratives about World War I had become actualised after 1949 when she had and her mother had been taken to Siberia. During the interview, she, surprisingly to herself, associated these real-life episodes by way of the similarity of emotional "charges", jumping the gap of more than three decades between the chronological sequence of the events. Still, these associations had to be existent during earlier narration situations: as she mentions "that's what mother used to say".

Such a temporary loss of control in the narrator, which in turn evoked stronger empathy in me as a listener, induced the question as to why the presentation of the hunger-topic differed from the way of presenting other subject matters. I analysed this nearly 40-minutes-long interview, inspired by the treatment of Alessandro Portelli, researcher of oral history (2000 [1991]: 65–66). According to this method an oral text is being interpreted by considering the reciprocal harmony of the narrative (subject matters, transfers from one topic to another, etc.) and the features of the rhythm of speech and voice (tone, speed, etc.). The analysis revealed that Laine was telling a story of coping, presented from the standpoint of the outcome. What came in the forefront were the summaries which at first sight remained in the shade of the event-related narratives but in the end remarkably shaped the messages regarding the very events of the critical time:

We've been burnt down once and we have wandered about and we've been abroad and... we've been all around. We've started from scratch and we haven't been naked either and have always had bread on the table... and we've raised and schooled four children ... So it's not been too bad. We have always coped.

The critical time in Laine's life history narrative as the *rupture* (see Kõresaar 2005: 69) of naturally ongoing life starts with her father's imprisonment in 1945 and ends in 1959 when she returns to Estonia with her family, after ten years of deportation. She summarises the time between her father's arrest and the deportation of the family

(1945–1949) as “constant harassment was going on”. To her knowledge, the “category” (i.e. reason) for her being deported is as follows: “Germans’ henchmen”<sup>13</sup>. More logically understandable reasons for imprisonment and deportation are generally not given in the life history narratives of Estonians. How were the accusations being perceived and how were they justified by the Soviet power will probably be one of the subject matters for future research.<sup>14</sup>

Both Jaan and Laine describe the moments of deportation by focusing on the events rather than feelings. Laine mentions that at the night of deportation her mother could not stay calm and her younger sister was “small, slim, only in the fifth form”. Laine was the one who packed the things at the presence of gunmen because “I already knew what life was about”. As a background to this knowledge she talks about the norms in forest work, established by the Soviet power, that she, a 19-year-old girl had to fulfil. She talks about the difficulties (cold, lack of tools, distance of the residence from the work site, wet clothes that could not be dried for the next workday etc.) and also about the measures to attempt to solve the situation (hints to cooperation with fellow sufferers). She talks about the threatening: if the norms are not fulfilled, the future would be Siberia or prison. She fell severely ill. The episode which started with the claim “I already knew what life was about” she concludes with the statement of the time: “as far as I’m concerned, they [Soviet authorities] can send me to Siberia or another Siberia or kill me right here, I will not go back there [in the forest] any more”. She did not touch upon the starvation experience during deportation narratives within this conversation.

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<sup>13</sup> Indeed, I came across such a definition, “Germans’ henchmen”, in 1945, in the lists of “people’s enemies” compiled by Soviet power representatives (LMA-198-1-15), but soon it was replaced by an expression “Germans’ myrmidons”. During the Soviet time, it was quite difficult to avoid being listed under this category within the territories that had been under the German occupation.

<sup>14</sup> In 1989, the Estonian Heritage Society collected data on the destiny of arrested and deported persons, by way of a questionnaire. The respondents consistently mention that the reasons for imprisonment and deportation remained unclear for them. For instance “were taken away without court ruling, my husband was in prison and I was taken away with two underage children. Those who took us away were men in military uniforms” (f born in 1918. Materials in the Läänemaa Museum: Memory, 1989). The Soviet authority’s standpoint could be researched after the collapse of the Soviet Union when access was opened to the archives of Soviet power institutions (see Mandel 2005).

Has Laine presented different descriptions regarding starvation experience? During our conversation, she mentioned that she had sent her narrative on her deportee-life to the Estonian National Museum. Indeed, the Museum has her responses to the questionnaire, compiled by researchers, on the following subject matter "The Deportation of 1949, Life as a Deportee".<sup>15</sup> The questionnaire focuses on the events and situations. Some questions also target the situation with food and hunger. Laine responds laconically, however, providing abundant information:

Food was very bad before we got land (later we got more land, ten hundredth, 1955). There was no bread, not even for those who went to work. We picked nettle and orach leaves (at cattle barns, they were more lushy there, growing on piles of manure). We chopped them, boiled with water and salt and ate. In 1953, the kolkhoz gave 9 kg of rye flour per family (irrespective of the size of the family, imagine this!). We also ate edible flower bulbs and other edible plants that we searched for in the steppe. Malnutrition was horrible! (ERM, KV 874, p. 165)

At the end of her writing, additionally to the responses to the questions presented by researchers, she once again returns to this subject matter: she expresses gratitude to an old woman with whom they were living in the village to where they were deported. It was namely this old woman who had taught them to eat all kinds of plants.

Laine's mode of presentation is subject to narration goals and situations. The framework of the narration creates room for variation (written responses to the questionnaire; interview situation, etc.). At the same time, she has a distinct repository of core narratives and a well-established system of assessments, which become evident in all of her presentations.

### **Events in the narrative and history**

In the following subsection I focus on the other facet of the problem: when the time (situation) of narration intermingles in itself the actual time of narration and the layers of earlier narrations, then how is it possible to separate the earlier time layers from the narratives? In

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<sup>15</sup> ERM, KV 874, pp. 156–170 (1999).



order to achieve this goal, I will again use different types of sources. The analysed example is based on Lembitu Varblane's narrative.<sup>16</sup> Similarly to Jaan and Laine Kindel, he comes from the same region in southern Läänemaa. Parallel sources comprise the minutes of the local authority meetings from 1944 to 1950, located in the Läänemaa County Archives in Haapsalu. The focus is on the depiction of post-war village life: in autumn 1944, warfare again reached Estonian soil. In places reached by the Red Army, Soviet power was established, and new life commenced with reorganisations, incl. the compilation of the lists of the so-called kulaks and Germans' myrmidons, accompanied by imprisonments and culminating in the large-scale deportation on March 25, 1949.

The narrator was recruited in the German army in 1943 (at that time, there was German occupation in Estonia). He managed to evade this by escaping to Finland where he served in the Finnish army. This, in turn, was a fact that had to be hidden from the new, Soviet power. In the following quote, there is an episode he was to face when returning home from Finland:

I reached home during the early hours of 23 September [1944]. There were tears of joy when meeting my mother and also the concern, sadness and enormous unknowing. My mother knew nothing about my father and brother. My brother had managed to escape safe and sound from the Lihula Self-Defence unit's<sup>17</sup> battle against Russians at Kärevere bridge, had come home in the meantime and then was taken away again. What kind of Self-Defence tasks did my father fulfil and where he was, my mother didn't know. To extinguish my hunger, I was given proper farm bread and milk. I couldn't wish for more. I wouldn't talk about my feelings about home-made bread. Dead tired, I fell in bed in order to rest a little. I felt terribly sorry to leave my mother alone. (KM, EKLA f 350: 921, p. 10)

This relatively squeezed description reveals the confusion at the private level, intrinsic of the end-of-the-war times: no knowledge about the destiny of the father and brother, hunger, food-related sensations, tiredness, empathy towards mother. Facts and feelings are densely intertwined. The stability, having been achieved step by step,

<sup>16</sup> Estonian Literary Museum (KM), EKLA f 350: 921. Lembitu Varblane has sent his written life history narrative to the relevant competition of "One Hundred Lives of a Century" (1999).

<sup>17</sup> Local police units, consisting of civilians, which operated during war-time.



is described in a more hinted manner, by way of adding a discussing summary:

In autumn 1948, my brother Vambola came home from war imprisonment. Somehow we managed to pay the increased norms and taxes imposed on the farm. Even my mother regained her mental balance. Both sons were safe and sound! We had to live on and worry less. The turns of Stalinist dictatorship could not be predicted. (KM, EKLA f350: 921, p. 12)

Going back to the documents of the time, one can only imagine how complicated was this period (1944–1948) in reality. In March 1945, the local authority has already compiled a list of those referred to as kulaks and Germans' myrmidons. Regarding the village where the narrator of the above-quoted story comes from, there were four people in such a list, including the narrator's mother.<sup>18</sup> These lists were not easy to be compiled neither for local inhabitants nor for authorities. Among the documents of the Läänemaa County Archives, there is an official reply to an official accusation as to why are there "only eight kulaks" in the rural municipality (the response is dated December 16, 1947).<sup>19</sup> This letter reflects the conflict between the representatives of power, recruited from among the local population, and those representatives of power who had arrived from elsewhere: local people know each other and therefore the attempt to "find" kulaks was not successful. The reply evidences that the situation is becoming "better" — the list already comprises 34 kulaks.

Who occurred to be in the list of kulaks? Jüri Kindel has, e.g. worded this in his response to the Estonian National Museum's questionnaire "Post-war village" as follows: there were five kulak-type farms in my home village. The farms were "blamed for" the following: "excellent farm and breeding animals", "threshing machine and newly cultivated lands", "Saaremaa-type post-windmill, threshing machine and a well-kept 40 ha farm", "Dutch-type windmill and well-kept lands and household" (this refers to his parents' home), "excellent smithy and large newly cultivated fields".<sup>20</sup> When reading the minutes of the local authority from 1944 to 1950, consolidated into a file titled "Agriculture", it turns out that in the given municipality,

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<sup>18</sup> Läänemaa County Archives LMA-198-1-15, pp. 5–6.

<sup>19</sup> LMA 198-1-66.

<sup>20</sup> ERM, KV 901, p. 53 (2000).

two major groups of inhabitants were considered to be the enemies of Soviet power: "kulaks" (the list of kulaks seemed to be supplemented by those who had used farmhands or servants in their farms prior to 1944, despite the fact that these servants and farmhands had not filed any complaints) and the "myrmidons of Germans" (whose relatives had served in the German army or in other way had themselves fought against Soviet power). Who is who, these were constant discussions, testimonies, accusations, contra-statements — during 1944–1949, people had to suffer enormous pressure in their daily life. Some were forced to give statements, some to justify themselves. In addition, land reform was conducted at the time, referred to by norms and excessive tax burden imposed on farms within the above-discussed narratives. (Forest work experience in Laine Kindel's narrative; in Lembitu Varblane's story: "Somehow we managed to pay the increased norms and taxes imposed on the farm".) Regarding the entire period, there are only a couple of sentences in the narrative: "We had to live on and worry less. The turns of Stalinist dictatorship could not be predicted." In general, people claim they had no idea about their possible future by any other means than rumours or hunches. Likewise, Jaan and Laine Kindel state the same.<sup>21</sup> Archive materials, however, show that such lists were compiled, discussed and disputed also at the local level.

Reading the minutes in the file "Agriculture" was a far more terrible experience for me than reading and listening to the narratives on this period. It can be stated that the depiction of such a reality is generally not a subject matter for narratives. There could be different reasons for this, e.g. the fact that the situation came to a solution in 1949 in connection with deportation and formation of kolkhozes. In narratives, they are topical as dominant events which indeed provided another direction to the course of life in the future. Undoubtedly, also the fact that these times are full of inconveniences, secrets and other issues that people would rather like to forget. There is no more lengthy contemplation on these people and themes.

People know the worst side of the daily life of the critical period, and that of their social group, however, they would not narrate about these issues but instead, mention the statements that have become the words of wisdom. In Lembitu Varblane's narrative, there are

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<sup>21</sup> ERM, KV 874, p. 156; p. 180 (1999).

numerous hints to unwritten rules for behaving in a critical situation and also to relevant violations. For instance:

The situation in the fronts became more difficult every day. I decided not to go to the German army. I was hiding myself and worked in my aunt's farm. In the village, they knew who I was *but a sensible rural family would not poke its nose into the issues of another family.*<sup>22</sup> (KM, EKLA f 350: 921, p. 2)

The narrator provides a contrary example of an episode where he returns from Finland – in the port of Tallinn, there is a German patrol checking his documents. He produces the papers of a Finnish navyman but *one faithful Estonian-speaking gendarme* had understood from his name that he was an Estonian, and consequently, evading the German army, and thus the narrator was put into the Pagari Street prison.<sup>23</sup>

The issue of intra-family relationships may also become lost in the descriptions of the critical time. For instance, in the above-described story, the narrator, when describing the deportation day (March 25, 1949) presents contemplation of the time: what else could this family expect if their “father [had] been sentenced to prison by the tribunal, as the enemy of Soviet power, and had died there.” The father is mentioned once more when the narrator himself has been arrested and he described the interrogations where his father is being referred to as the enemy of Soviet power. When was the father imprisoned?<sup>24</sup> When did he die? How did they learn about this? Was it already known in 1949 (the way the narrator presents it in his story, by uniting his knowledge of his father's death and the deporting of her mother, 50 years after the described event) or did they actually learn about this (father's death) later? If in the pre-war description, the father is depicted as a relatively concrete character, then after the war, the father disappears from the narrative, even at the level of mentioning

<sup>22</sup> Here and in the following example, emphasis by T. J.

<sup>23</sup> KM, EKLA f 350: 921, p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> Pursuant to the published list of arrested persons (Õispuu 1998: 568) Jaan Varblane was arrested on November 28, 1944; the tribunal charged him guilty on March 14, 1945, pursuant to § 58-1a (ten years in prison plus 5 years as a deportee). However, nothing is said about the future destiny. According to a historian Aigi Rahi (2004: II 9), during 1944–1945, approximately 10,000 men were arrested due to political reasons, “half of them died within the first two years”.

the facts. When reading the minutes of the local authority meeting, dated from April 9, 1948, where once again, there is a discussion whether the narrator's mother should be declared the "myrmidon of Germans", due to her husband's activity, it turns out as if the spouses had been quarrelling and separated in 1942, where-after family ties had been broken.<sup>25</sup> A decision follows: as the spouses were not living together during the German occupation, it is not necessary to consider the wife's household as "the household of the Germans' myrmidons". (Despite this she was deported on March 25, 1949.) Such a consideration could have been either a partial or full self-protection. The husband had already been arrested (or even dead), it was impossible to protect him, however, it was still possible to protect the remaining members of the family. The narrative also comprises the tactics used at interrogation (March 1949):

Concerning my biography, I repeated what had been written down in the questionnaire and the CV. They were particularly interested as to who I was hiding at in Pirita. I knew that this men had fled to the West, that's why I could make up more lengthy things out about my life. (KM, EKLA f 350: 921, p. 15.)

The impact of critical times on people's course of life becomes predominant in narratives. In the newly independent Estonia, deportation and life as a deportee are public themes, similarly to the serving in different armies. Changes in family relationships in a historically critical era, and particularly the issues regarding interrogations and informers are of marginal relevance in the public or totally absent in the narratives. However, I have heard this privately (in the family and close circle) since my childhood.

For the current treatment, only one layer (the depiction of the critical time) has been chosen from Lembitu Varblane's 19-page-long life history narrative, being limited within one theme (post-war life in Estonian village). At this level, it is intrinsic of the built-up of the narrative to describe the events, assess the situation from one's own standpoint and decide as to how to cope. The latter also involves the valuing of wisdom based on earlier life experience. For instance, the summary of the situation and an advice from a great-uncle "who had suffered a lot during his young age". "David won Goliath with

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<sup>25</sup> LMA 198-1-66, p. 19.



cleverness, don't do anything thoughtless! Stay calm and see what's going on."<sup>26</sup> Similar experience to behave exactly in such a manner, during the post-war critical times, can be found in different wordings, which means – this is a more general understanding than only presenting a standpoint of a single family or a man.<sup>27</sup> I have interpreted this life history narrative as an experience narrative which unites personal experience and that of the others into a uniform wisdom.

### **In conclusion**

Using the example of three narrators, the article dealt with the depiction of critical times in a post-World War II village in West-Estonia. The depiction of the 1940s consolidated earlier family history and the later destiny of the narrators. The coherence of times in narratives refers to tradition-based perception of time, and specifically, to the quality attributed to the time. Times with similar qualities rely on each other, and thus become actualised over and over again. The knowledge, about times that differ from the narrator's own experience, moves to the more passive side of the tradition.

The ideology regarding the narratives of critical times is one and the same, irrespective of the fact whether the story has been immediately told to listeners, presented as a written response to questions or created as a free-structured written narrative. The narratives proceed from the narrator's point of view and his or her convictions which have evolved during a longer time period and are now, as an analysed text, one of the outcomes of the tradition. Current socio-historic background in Estonia created preconditions for the selection of certain themes. During the post-Soviet time, the themes regarding arrests, deportations and the serving in different armies have become public. By way of this, the knowledge on the size and the boundaries of the 'our-group' is becoming more thorough, and relates to the issues concerning the moulding and designing of identity in society. In

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<sup>26</sup> KM, EKLA f 350: 921, p. 11.

<sup>27</sup> E.g., one of the narrators from Saaremaa says the following about what he had heard in his village: *you can't always get a medal and solve situations with a lot of noise...* "Living between big nations, we could have been milled into powder a long time ago if we hadn't had the skills to manage our things little by little under each emperor." (KM, EKLA f 350: 1809)



narratives, the focus is on one's decisions and behaviour within the framework prescribed by history. The subject matter regarding collaboration with the totalitarian occupation authorities (informers) is only hinted at, whereas the intra-family relationships-related topic "loses grip". The latter is undoubtedly conditioned by the lack of interest and even knowledge regarding the destiny of the close ones, a phenomenon intrinsic of the 1950s. At that time, it was impolite to ask strangers (e.g., schoolmates) about their origin or anything concerning their personal life. This domain was associated with the experience of the 1940s repressions, but could also affect the life of people towards an undesirable direction, during the entire Soviet period.

Discussions have been held whether memoirs are a reliable source for the research of the past. The same way, we could ask whether the NKVD materials are reliable. What kinds of tactics were used by Soviet functionaries to get testimonies? What kinds of tactics were used by those being interrogated? Regarding the standpoint of the current research, the issue of the reliability of facts is not of greatest relevance. Within the extent of the observed materials, the truths of the narratives did not become doubtful in the light of history documents, nor vice versa. Comparison of memories and archive materials offers intermittent alteration of distant and close-up views, enabling the observation of certain narration rules, as, for instance, the confluence of times, conditioned by forgetting in Jaan Kindel's narrative, actualisation of the theme in Laine Kindel's narration, and the screening out of wisdom in Lembitu Varblane's narrative. Juxtaposition of archive materials and narratives may indeed emerge questions (as in the case of Lembitu Varblane's mother and father), but this would not alter the perception regarding the events.<sup>28</sup>

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**Критические события 1940-х годов  
в эстонских жизнеописаниях**

В статье рассматривается, каким образом критические времена, связанные с приходом Советской власти и Второй мировой войной, отражались в жизнеописаниях, написанных во вновь независимой Эстонии. Анализ устных рассказов сравнивает тексты из южной части Läänemaa (интервью проведены в 2005 году), материалом для анализа написанных историй послужили ответы на вопросник Эстонского национального музея и жизнеописания, собранные в сборнике «Сто жизнеописаний века» (1999). Исторический контекст был почерпнут из материалов Эстонского исторического архива и архива уезда Läänemaa.

Исследование сфокусировано на двух главных вопросах. Первый: различаются ли устные и письменные нарративы только по форме, или они имеют и разное содержание (разные идеологии). Второй: воспоминания и исторические документы только дополняют друг друга, или они меняют наши представления о случившемся. Нарративы представлены с определенной точки зрения, следуя убеждениям рассказчика, при этом главное сообщение остается тем же в разных презентациях. Рассказы основаны на опыте о том, как люди справлялись (как на практическом так и на ментальном уровнях) в трудных условиях. Конфликта между историческими источниками и воспоминаниями не наблюдается, но добавление исторических источников позволяет лучше проследивать развертывание нарративной традиции (нарративные правила) и высвечивать новые вопросы (скрытые в нарративе).

**1940. aastate kriitilised sündmused eesti elulugudes**

Artiklis vaadeldakse, kuidas praegu, taasiseseisvunud Eestis kirjutatud elulugudes kajastuvad kriitilised ajad, mille tingisid Nõukogude võimu kehtestamise ja Teise maailmasõjaga kaasnenud sündmused (sõjaolukord, okupatsioonid, massirepressioonid). Pärimusliku ajaloo vaatepunktist analüüsitakse tekste Lõuna-Läänemaaalt: suuline eluloointervjuu (2005), kirjalikud vastused Eesti Rahva Muuseumi küsitlusele “1949. aasta küüditamine, elu asumisel” (1999) ja vaba struktuuriga kirjalik eluloojutustus, mis on saadetud Eesti Kirjandusmuuseumi elulugude kogumisvõistlusele “Sajandi sada elulugu” (1999). Ajaloolise konteksti loomiseks on kasutatud materjale Eesti Ajalooarhiivist ja Lääne Maa-arhiivist.

Käsitluses on kesksed kaks küsimust. Esmalt, kas suulised ja kirjalikud jutustused erinevad vaid esitusviisi poolest või kannavad need endas ka erinevaid sõnumeid (ideoloogiaid). Teiseks, kas mälestused ja ajaloodokumendid ainult täiendavad üksteist või muudavad nad olemuslikult ka sündmustest saadavaid ettekujutusi. Avalikkusele esitatakse kogemusjutustused, kuidas rasketes oludes hakkama saadi, seda nii praktilisel kui ka mentaalsel tasandil. Lood esitatakse teatud vaatepunktist jutustajate veendumuste kohaselt, mistõttu lugude põhisõnum jääb erinevates esitustes samaks. Konflikti ajalooallikate ja mälestuste vahel esile ei tulnud. Küll aga võimaldab ajalooallikate lisamine mälestuste uurimisse paremini jälgida jututraditsiooni kujunemist (jutustamisreeglid) ja esile tuua uusi (loos varju jäävaid) küsimusi.



## La construction de la mémoire coloniale en Érythrée: les Erythréens, les Métis, les Italiens

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**Abstract.** *The construction of memory in colonial Eritrea: Eritreans, Mestizos and Italians.* Focusing on some passages of life histories collected in Asmara and based on the 'memory of Italy', I study the representation of the past in order to reveal the shaping of the subjective experience by the colonial discourse in Eritrea. If the main aim of my essay is the understanding of the play of interactions between individuals and collectivity, one more important element I take into account is 'memory' seen as a "social selection of remembering" (Halbwachs). I try to connect the social position and narrative role of single members (of the Eritrean society) to the meaning it takes the 'going back to the past' for them as individuals belonging to a group (an Eritrean, a Mestizo, an Italian) in relation to the past and the present. The consequence is that the logic dominant/dominated is inadequate to explain the internal articulations of the colonial context and that the focus must be shifted on individual and collective systems of expectations and on the negotiations of meaning resulting from a "past always to be recovered" and a "present always to be rebuilt".

A partir de fragments d'histoires de vie collectées sur le terrain à Asmara (en Érythrée) et centrées sur la 'mémoire de l'Italie', je vais m'interroger dans la présente contribution sur les modalités de représentation du passé afin d'essayer de comprendre de quelle manière l'expérience subjective se configure sur le fond de l'expérience coloniale. Si, donc, la finalité réside dans la saisie du jeu d'interactions qui se crée entre un sujet et la collectivité, un élément central est en outre constitué par le relais de la mémoire entendue en tant que

« sélection sociale du souvenir » (Halbwachs 2001). Celle-ci répond à des mécanismes liés à la position de l'interlocuteur dans la société érythréenne et à la signification que prend pour un individu (un érythréen, un métis, un italien) le « retour au passé » par rapport au contexte passé et présent. Dans cette perspective, la seule logique dominant/dominé n'est pas adéquate pour comprendre les articulations internes à la réalité coloniale, une réalité qu'il faut investiguer en se focalisant sur les systèmes d'attentes individuels et collectifs, sur les finalités subjectives et historiques, sur la base de négociations des sens stratifiés dans la sédimentation d'un « passé toujours à récupérer » et d'un « présent instable ».

La mémoire, donc, entendue comme mécanisme dynamique qui récupère le passé tout en l'actualisant, c'est-à-dire en le faisant revivre à partir du présent. Pour cette raison, il faut souligner que, si la remémoration contribue à récupérer la signification d'un événement spécifique et isolé, la mise en relation de ces mêmes événements sur des séquences linéaires, engendre plusieurs parcours de sens qui dépendent de la coïncidence de traits différents tels que l'appartenance d'un individu aux divers groupes sociaux, leur articulation interne et les systèmes d'attentes qui les soutiennent. La configuration spécifique de l'ensemble de ces éléments donne lieu à des représentations multiples et plurielles. Plus concrètement (bien que la question concerne de manière plus générale la connaissance anthropologique et la 'forme' que celle-ci prend conformément au paradigme théorique de référence<sup>1</sup>), choisir comme objet d'étude les histoires de vie — c'est-à-dire la mémoire qui, à travers ces histoires, se sédimente sous forme de texte — entraîne une réflexion sur le *processus* de la recherche, sur sa *construction* et sur l'*interaction* anthropologue/interlocuteur privilégié (le 'natif' ou l'informateur). Dans la présente contribution, plutôt que d'aborder la question des histoires de vie dans toute son ampleur, je me limiterai à discuter certains points qui ouvrent des parcours de réflexion possibles.

En ce qui concerne les exemples choisis, je suis obligé de les présenter comme représentatifs du groupe de référence dans sa totalité (érythréens, métis, italiens) et donc de passer sous silence des

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<sup>1</sup> L'espace réduit de cette contribution ne permet pas d'approfondir la question et d'explicitier les connexions. Pour un approfondissement, cf. D'Agostino; Montes 2002-2004 et D'Agostino 2008.

articulations internes à chaque groupe<sup>2</sup>. Il n'en est pas ainsi dans la réalité, mais j'espère parvenir à communiquer ici quand même la complexité du sujet étudié.

Tout d'abord je voudrais exprimer certaines considérations sur l'emploi du terme « métis ». Au début j'étais un peu réticente à l'employer mais l'expérience sur le terrain m'a fait comprendre que dans le contexte contemporain, il a « généralement » une acception neutre et dénotative. Au-delà de la connotation négative du terme dans le passé, dont les habitants d'Asmara sont bien conscients, le fait est que dans la société érythréenne contemporaine le terme "métis" est employé par les métis eux-mêmes couramment, sans aucune connotation. J'aurais pu employer le terme "italo-érythréen" mais celui-ci évoque une condition juridique et sa neutralité apparente aurait occulté le caractère situationnel et historiquement déterminé du statut des individus en question, ainsi que la complexité de leur condition. En outre, de nombreux métis n'ont pas encore résolu leur position juridique et cherchent aujourd'hui encore à obtenir du Gouvernement italien la reconnaissance de leur ascendance paternelle. Utiliser la dénomination « italo-érythréens » les aurait exclus.

Il semble que les quelques Italiens qui vivent encore en Érythrée et qui appartiennent aux classes moyennes, utilisent également le terme "métis" dans un sens exclusivement dénotatif. Par contre, pour les Érythréens non métis, le terme conserve nettement l'acception négative et méprisante de « bâtard ». L'ambiguïté inhérente au statut social des métis est assez bien exprimée par un dicton du Tigré que l'on peut encore entendre: «Attention aux Métis parce qu'ils ont deux cœurs ». Ce genre de représentation est rejetée par les Érythréens qui ont un certain niveau d'instruction et qui appartiennent aux milieux les plus favorisés. Toutefois elle continue à avoir cours, comme, par exemple, l'a exprimée un de mes interlocuteurs, représentant de l'élite d'Asmara. Le récit concerne une situation particulière du passé mais, comme nous le verrons, il y a une oscillation des temps des verbes (qui ne dépend pas d'une connaissance imparfaite de la langue italienne) et la narration finit par se référer au présent et se complique encore plus pour l'évocation de la composante "ethnique" éthiopienne:

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<sup>2</sup> Relativement à cet aspect, dans les dernières pages de cette contribution, j'insère un exemple sans pour autant le commenter: il s'agit de deux témoignages d'Italiens dont les parcours de sens sont toutefois très différents.

Les Érythréens se comportaient comme un groupe fermé, et les Métis étaient considérés comme des gens à part. Naturellement, il n'y a pas de différences substantielles de personnalités, car les Métis sont eux aussi nés ici, de mères érythréennes, mais c'étaient des *dikala* (« bâtards »); il y avait, et il y a sans doute encore, un préjugé à l'égard de cette classe sociale dérivant du complexe de supériorité de l'Érythréen, qui se sentait toujours supérieur aux autres, y compris par rapport aux Italiens. Même s'ils savaient très bien que les Italiens possédaient une technologie plus avancée et connaissaient beaucoup de choses, les Érythréens se sentaient supérieurs. Ils avaient la même attitude vis-à-vis des Arabes, ils les évitaient; c'est en ce sens qu'il faut comprendre tout cela, à cette époque-là, *les Érythréens ne fréquentaient pas les gens des autres communautés*<sup>3</sup>.

Les femmes érythréennes qui ont eu des enfants avec des Italiens étaient en général des domestiques qui faisaient surtout le ménage, puis la cuisine, etc. Elles sont indiscutablement érythréennes, mais il reste le fait qu'aucun Érythréen ne se mariera jamais avec elles, car elles ont désormais perdu leur dignité, avec leur virginité. En effet, tous les Érythréens prétendent que leur femme soit vierge au mariage et ils n'accepteraient jamais d'épouser une femme qui ne le serait pas, ils la considèrent comme une paria; à plus forte raison si elle a eu des rapports avec un Italien. Vous avez sans doute eu l'occasion de remarquer que les Métis, et en particulier les femmes, nés de ces relations sont très beaux, de tous les points de vue, mais leur beauté physique laisse les Érythréens indifférents, aujourd'hui comme alors. Seuls les Ethiopiens avaient osé se marier massivement avec des métis. Les Érythréens continuaient à rester très conservateurs, à constituer un groupe à part... (Kidane Zerezhgi)

La manière dont ce même interlocuteur érythréen s'exprime à propos de la composition et de l'organisation de la société est significative. Il privilégie la dimension « ethnique » et insiste encore une fois sur la composante éthiopienne<sup>4</sup> qui, d'après lui, est responsable d'une déstabilisation supplémentaire:

<sup>3</sup> Il est intéressant de remarquer la contradiction: s'il existent des métis c'est parce que des Érythréens (ou, plus exactement, des Érythréennes) ont fréquenté « d'autres communautés ». Le point de vue exprimé est très clair, comme on peut l'observer aussi dans le passage qui suit tout de suite après: c'est un point de vue à la fois élitiste (être Érythréen coïncide avec l'élite Érythréenne) et androcentrique (être Érythréen correspond à être un mâle Érythréen).

<sup>4</sup> Nous savons que la guerre des Érythréens contre l'Éthiopie a été cruelle et qu'elle a duré plus de trente ans. L'Érythrée a obtenu l'indépendance en 1994, au moins du point de vue politique et formel.

Nous n'avions jamais de rapports avec les Italiens ni avec les Métis. Ce n'est pas que les Érythréens détestaient les Métis mais, pour une raison ou pour une autre, ils voulaient limiter leurs rapports aux autres Érythréens. Les mélanges entre les Métis et les autres n'ont eu lieu que plus tard, sous le régime de Haïlé Sélassié quand les Amhara ont commencé à se marier avec des Métis; aussi bien durant la période des Italiens qu'à l'époque anglaise, la société était comme divisée en classes: il y avait les Italiens, puis les Métis et enfin, les Érythréens... comme s'ils constituaient pour ainsi dire une caste à part; je ne me souviens pas qu'à cette époque un Érythréen se soit marié avec une métisse, les mélanges n'auront lieu qu'après l'avènement de l'occupation éthiopienne. (Kidane Zereghhi)

Un Italien, né dans la Colonie, a des souvenirs différents:

A l'école nous avions de bons rapports entre camarades, nous étions bien amalgamés, très bien même. Naturellement, plus la famille était riche, plus elle avait de possibilités d'être favorisée; [...] mais [...] la différence "ethnique" n'était même pas considérée, nous étions tous des êtres humains [...] nous avions beaucoup de choses en commun [...] Logiquement dans la vie sociale ceux qui avaient plus d'argent pouvaient avoir certaines relations. Par exemple, il y avait le club italien et il était très exclusif. Pour en faire partie, il fallait avoir la carte et payer les cotisations. Il y avait d'autres clubs, celui de l'université, le club sportif, que tout le monde pouvait fréquenter. La sélection se faisait donc sur la base du patrimoine. Le club italien était fréquenté par les riches, mais nous les jeunes, nous fréquentions les autres. Là il n'y avait pas de distinctions, les Érythréens et les Métis ne se sentaient pas rejetés. La différence se faisait en fonction de la situation économique, comme partout. (Vittorio Volpicella)

Durant les rencontres sur le terrain avec mes interlocuteurs, j'ai délibérément choisi de les laisser exposer librement leurs opinions et leurs arguments. Je leur demandais seulement de se présenter et de commencer leur récit, en partant de leur nom et leur état civil. Si, en général, dans un récit autobiographique il n'est pas difficile de comprendre la fonction du nom propre comme «marqueur d'identité» (Bourdieu 1995: 75), dans ce contexte, il prend une valeur symbolique particulièrement significative et déterminante. Voici l'*incipit* de trois "histoires" racontées à Asmara en septembre 2003:

Je m'appelle Giovanni Mazzola, je suis né à Asmara le 28 mai 1940. Je suis tailleur. Mon père s'appelait Salvatore. Je suis le troisième de six enfants: Alberto, Enzo, moi, Paolo, Sandro et Lidia. Mon père est arrivé à Asmara en 1935-36 et il y est resté jusqu'en 1949. Quand il en est parti, j'avais neuf ans.



Je m'appelle Maria Mazzola, mon nom de jeune fille est Maria Bertellini. Je suis née le 4 septembre 1949. Mon père s'appelait Salvatore Mauro mais je ne porte pas son nom parce qu'il n'a pas pu me reconnaître. Je crois que mon père est arrivé en Érythrée avec les soldats italiens durant la guerre de 35.

Je m'appelle Giacomo Tutone. Je suis né à Asmara le 9 avril 1935. J'ai vécu ici jusqu'en 1952. Mon père était italien, de Palerme, il a dû naître vers 1886. Il était venu comme militaire, avec les « chemises noires », entre 1926 et 1930, je pense. Ma mère s'appelait Zaitù Gheremarià. [...] Mon père est resté ici jusqu'en 1950.

En ce qui concerne les Métis dont nous venons de lire les témoignages, il est facile de comprendre combien la mémoire des pères constitue un dispositif fondamental pour mettre en forme la perception et la représentation d'eux-mêmes. Ce dispositif est étroitement lié à ce que j'ai appelé la « mémoire de l'Italie », thème plus général de ma recherche. La « mémoire de l'Italie » passe par la mémoire des pères. On retrouve une partie de l'histoire de l'Érythrée dans les récits de ces individus qui ont un père italien. Leur histoire se construit à partir d'une expérience douloureuse, d'un deuil qu'ils ne sont pas encore parvenus à élaborer. C'est cette expérience personnelle souvent inachevée, et douloureuse car inachevée, qui alimente les souvenirs et permet parfois de s'"inventer" un rapport. Le parent est une sorte d'ancêtre "mythique". Leur "identité" a du mal à trouver une collocation précise. Elle renvoie à une condition différente du sentiment d'être "italien" ou "érythréen". Il s'agit d'une identité métisse justement, au sens propre du terme. Cette stratégie de se donner un passé, à la fois individuel et social, même sans avoir eu une expérience durable pour l'y ancrer<sup>5</sup>, constitue l'expérience subjective d'une condition objective: la position ambiguë des soi-disant métis dans l'imaginaire social. D'une manière confuse, contradictoire par rapport au contexte — du discours, de la situation — ils se représentent comme un peu moins que des Italiens et un peu plus que des Érythréens. Cette rencontre de l'Histoire (avec un H majuscule)

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<sup>5</sup> Il n'est pas rare que les gens aient peu de souvenirs de leur père, limités à une période brève et qu'avec le temps, ces souvenirs se soient exaltés. Dans le récit précédent, Giovanni Mazzola dit que son père est parti quand il avait neuf ans. Toutefois, sans s'apercevoir de la contradiction, il continue son récit de la manière suivante: «Je me rappelle beaucoup de choses de mon père, beaucoup de choses. C'était une personne très active, dynamique et inventive. Il faisait tout ce qu'il pouvait afin de nous inculquer l'intérêt pour l'école, pour les études ».

d'un territoire avec des histoires individuelles et familiales, le caractère indissociable d'événements historiques et personnels, constitue une des caractéristiques de la sémiosphère relative à la "réalité" d'Asmara.

Il peut être intéressant de confronter les textes précédents avec la manière de se présenter de l'interlocuteur cité au début:

Je m'appelle Kidane Zerezghi, je suis érythréen à 100%, né à Saganeiti, à 62 km au sud d'Asmara le 8 décembre 1931, durant la période coloniale italienne. Naturellement je ne me rappelle pas grand chose de mon enfance... mon père était un officier du gouvernement italien de l'époque, c'était un fonctionnaire des douanes, un haut fonctionnaire. A cette époque-là, Massaua dépendait de trois personnes et mon père était l'un des trois. C'étaient les fonctionnaires supérieurs de la douane érythréenne à Massaua. J'étais enfant à l'époque, mais peu à peu je me rendais compte que nous vivions sous la colonisation italienne.

Dans les récits des Métis, la question de la "reconnaissance" des enfants nés d'hommes italiens et de femmes érythréennes occupe une position centrale. J'ai abordé ce sujet dans un article écrit avec Stefano Montes et je ne m'attarderai pas sur ce point (D'Agostino, Montes 2002–2004). Toutefois j'évoque cet aspect, car il a une grande importance dans toutes les histoires que j'ai entendues: le rapport entre l'*individuel* et le *collectif*. Même si les histoires de vies appartiennent à la sphère individuelle, leur construction reflète des connexions avec le social particulièrement prégnantes pour la compréhension du flux des événements en question. Bien qu'il s'agisse d'événements vécus directement par les narrateurs, qui les concernent donc directement, on observe une projection du sujet de l'énonciation hors de soi (*débrayage*<sup>6</sup>) sous la forme d'un actant collectif: celui qui parle dit "nous", transférant à l'improvisiste le récit de la modalité d'énonciation à la première personne ("Je m'appelle", "je suis né", etc.) à l'énonciation collective. Ce glissement, ce *décalage de l'énonciation* comporte un ancrage à une condition dans laquelle ont lieu les vicissitudes personnelles. Même la naissance est considérée dans un

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<sup>6</sup> Greimas et Courtés définissent le *débrayage* de la manière suivante: « L'opération par laquelle l'instance de l'énonciation disjoint et projette hors d'elle-même, lors de l'acte de langage et en vue de la manifestation, certains termes liés à sa structure de base pour constituer ainsi les éléments fondateurs de l'énoncé-discours. » (Greimas; Courtés 1993: 79).

cadre qui assume un caractère social, comme un phénomène collectif concernant un grand nombre de personnes. Puis, la responsabilité de la non-reconnaissance n'est jamais attribuée à la mauvaise volonté du père, mais à un ensemble de normes, de lois et d'obstacles impersonnels que, dans tous les cas, les pères ont affronté:

La loi ne reconnaissait pas ce fait. De nombreux Italiens étaient honnêtes et voulaient reconnaître leurs enfants, même provisoirement. [...] Notre père a été très correct parce qu'il est allé dans un tribunal et il nous a reconnus comme ses enfants légitimes avec le nom de Mazzola en présence de témoins. Puis il a déposé cet acte chez un notaire qui l'a ensuite transmis à la Cour et celle-ci l'a fait parvenir à la Mairie pour l'y enregistrer. Ainsi l'acte a été reconnu. (Giovanni Mazzola)

Mon père n'avait pas pu nous reconnaître, ni mon frère ni moi, car il avait une femme en Italie, Giuseppina Greco, qui s'y opposait. [...] Pour cette raison, je portais le nom de ma mère, mais cela ne lui plaisait pas, elle disait toujours: "pourquoi la fille d'un italien doit-elle porter mon nom ?". (Maria Mazzola)

Maria Mazzola explique pourquoi son père ne l'a pas reconnu et fait allusion à une norme, en vigueur alors, qui permettait à un Italien, avec l'autorisation de sa femme italienne légitime, de reconnaître des enfants nés dans les colonies de mères érythréennes. Elle continue son récit ainsi:

Mon père et ma mère s'entendaient bien, je m'en souviens. Mais il y avait des moments où ils se disputaient parce que ma mère lui reprochait toujours de ne pas nous donner son nom et elle voulait savoir pourquoi il ne le faisait pas. [...] Elle l'a découvert plus tard [...] Ainsi elle a connu ce Monsieur Bertellini qui nous a reconnus, mon frère et moi, comme ses propres fils. Mon père était au courant ...

Giacomo Tutone explique lui aussi le fait que son père ne l'a pas reconnu, bien qu'il en ait eu l'intention, par un probable refus de l'épouse italienne. Toutefois, son frère aîné a exaucé le désir du père:

Mon père tenait absolument à me reconnaître comme son fils, il y tenait beaucoup, j'étais son fils comme tous les autres. Mais à cette époque-là il y avait des lois très sévères ici. En outre, sa femme n'était probablement pas d'accord pour qu'il me reconnaisse et mon père a donc eu beaucoup de difficultés. Ce sont mes frères qui ont trouvé la solution pour le contenter et me faire reconnaître et c'est finalement mon frère, l'aîné, qui m'a reconnu. Il

était né en 1913, moi en 35, il y avait donc une belle différence d'âge entre nous.

Certes, cela peut sembler bizarre, parce que du point de vue légal, je suis le fils de mon frère mais je n'y ai jamais accordé beaucoup d'importance. Mon père m'a dit qu'il ne fallait pas y accorder d'importance: "l'important, c'est que tu sois mon fils et que tu t'appelles Tutone", c'est ça qui était important pour mon père. (Giacomo Tutone)

Un autre aspect intéressant qui émerge de ces histoires est le discours public du pouvoir. Foucault (1977, 1989) nous enseigne qu'une des images publiques du *discours* colonial concerne l'exercice du pouvoir sans l'utilisation directe de la force. L'imposition de l'*ordre* du dominateur (quel que soit le type de domination dont il s'agit) trouve un terrain d'application dans des domaines, seulement en apparence bien loin du pouvoir politique au sens strict du terme, comme l'hygiène, la sexualité ou la famille par exemple.

Dans un long passage du récit de Giovanni Mazzola, cette reconstruction du souvenir du père assume des caractéristiques intéressantes:

Mon père attribuait les terrains aux indigènes, certains acceptaient, d'autres étaient perplexes ou parfois se vexaient parce que souvent les terrains étaient loin de la ville. *Quand il rédigeait ces actes de construction, mon père spécifiait qu'ils devaient commencer par construire les services, la cuisine et les toilettes.* Il n'approuvait l'autorisation de construire le reste de l'habitation, le salon et les chambres, qu'après avoir vérifié personnellement la construction effective des services. Je suis allé plusieurs fois avec mon père sur les lieux où il travaillait. J'étais petit, j'avais six, sept ans et *je me rappelle qu'il tenait beaucoup à l'hygiène. Par exemple il désapprouvait les femmes qui lavaient leur linge devant la route et y jetaient ensuite l'eau sale.* Quelquefois, il renversait le récipient dans lequel elles lavaient leur linge, cela je le lui ai vu faire personnellement, de mes propres yeux.

Giovanni Mazzola, sans s'en rendre compte, reprend un *discours* colonial fondé sur cette logique du pouvoir déclinée en termes de domination moins comme exploitation que comme action civilisatrice finalisée à l'introduction du seul ordre possible. En effet il ajoute:

Je trouve qu'aujourd'hui la tâche est plus compliquée et la responsabilité plus importante par rapport à autrefois car la population a augmenté et les conditions d'hygiène se sont détériorées. La population devrait recevoir une éducation saine et civile dès la naissance et comprendre l'importance vitale de

l'hygiène, elle est nécessaire pour rester en bonne santé. Je le dis souvent aux gens dans la langue locale, *ziriet addé tehennah*, "l'hygiène est la mère de la santé", je le répète pour en convaincre les gens, je me rends dans les quartiers les plus sales, dans des endroits où beaucoup de gens refusent d'aller à cause de la saleté. [...] je le fais parce que je suis convaincu qu'il est juste de le faire [...]

La syntaxe privilégiée du *discours* du pouvoir colonial qui impose un ordre s'exerce en outre jusque dans l'articulation des espaces et des connexions entre eux; à ces espaces et à ces connexions on assigne (et on les laisse traverser par) les différentes composantes "raciales". Si l'*apartheid* est l'expression extrême du système de ségrégation (fondé sur une institution légale des "races"), des formes d'*apartheid*, plus ou moins rigides, ont été mises en place dans toutes les expériences de domination coloniale. Le cas italien, bien entendu, ne fait pas exception. Au contraire, de ce point de vue la fondation de la ville d'Asmara est exemplaire (comme à Massawa, l'autre réalité urbaine significative d'Érythrée). Dans l'attribution des espaces et la séparation, plus ou moins rigide mais évidente, des différentes composantes sociales "racialisées", se dessine une trame précise des *lieux*, comme on l'observe dans les récits des gens concernés. Ainsi s'exprime "l'Érythréen à 100%" de tout à l'heure:

[...] en ce temps-là nous ne comprenions pas ce qui se passait, tout ce que nous savions c'était qu'on nous avait évacués de notre maison à Massawa. Nous étions allés à Saganeiti où nous n'aurions dû rester que cinq mois, d'après ce qu'on nous avait dit. J'avais huit ans, je ne me souviens plus très bien de ce qui s'est passé ensuite, mais je me rappelle que ma mère disait que nous avions eu une maison près du phare dans le port de Massawa, puis que les Italiens avaient décidé que ce quartier leur appartenait et ils nous ont relogés près de l'église orthodoxe... et de là ils nous ont à nouveau expulsés. (Kidane Zerezghi)

Giovanni Mazzola se souvient:

Le racisme se manifestait dans le fait que nous les jeunes métis, nous ne pouvions pas faire d'études supérieures, même si certains d'entre nous étaient intelligents. [...]. Je m'en souviens très bien, comme si c'était hier [...]: j'allais à la messe de huit heures à la Cathédrale parce que j'aimais me lever de bonne heure et chanter en chœur avec les autres fidèles. A un moment donné, une bonne sœur venait et me faisait changer de place pour me mettre derrière les autres. Je ne comprenais pas, puis je regardais autour de moi et je



voyais qu'ils étaient tous italiens, tous blancs. J'avais 11 ou 12 ans, mon père était déjà reparti et ce problème existait, aussi bien à l'école que dans la Cathédrale. (Giovanni Mazzola)

Voici ce que dit Giacomo Tutone

[...] je me souviens que les métis, sincèrement, vivaient dans des conditions difficiles parce qu'ils n'étaient pas acceptés, ni par les uns ni par les autres. En fait, ils constituaient un groupe à part, ils étaient exclus, pas tous naturellement, mais la plupart [...] Moi, personnellement, je dois dire la vérité, je n'ai rien subi de tout cela, à part une fois, un triste souvenir. J'étais allé trouver mon père à Dekemharé, avec ma mère, et comme mon père ne pouvait pas nous raccompagner à la maison nous avons pris le car. *En général, dans les cars il y avait une situation terrible: les blancs se mettaient d'un côté et les noirs de l'autre, mais malheureusement dans ce car il n'y avait même pas cette distinction, c'était un véhicule réservé aux blancs. Avec nous il y avait une dame italo-érythréenne, elle aussi avait la peau plutôt claire, à peu près comme moi*, et quand nous avons voulu prendre l'autobus pour rentrer à Asmara, ils ont laissé monter la dame et moi, mais ils ont interdit à ma mère d'entrer et lui ont fermé la porte au nez [...] (Giacomo Tutone)

Le témoignage d'un autre interlocuteur, un Italien, est intéressant, ainsi que la justification qu'il donne:

[...] quand je suis arrivé à Asmara je me suis rendu compte qu'il y avait des lignes d'autobus pour le transport civil où un séparé métallique, pas comme dans un fourgon carcéral bien sûr, divisait l'intérieur en deux et que la partie postérieure était réservée à la population locale. Mais pourquoi cela ? Je me refuse de croire que c'était parce qu'ils étaient noirs et que nous étions blancs. C'était pour une question d'hygiène, de manque de propreté, comme on peut le constater aujourd'hui encore à cause d'une mauvaise éducation; si en plus on pense aux parasites, aux comportements, aux habitudes, aux manières de manger et de s'habiller, tout cela en disait long ... d'ailleurs je crois sincèrement que les choses n'ont pas tellement changé, durant les soixante dernières années... Naturellement, aujourd'hui les blancs sont désormais une minorité par rapport à la population érythréenne, mais je ne crois pas qu'ils utilisent les moyens de transport public, à part le taxi, en tout cas ils ne prennent certainement pas l'autobus où c'est la bagarre, une bagarre qui en dit long (C. G.).

Il s'agit d'un témoignage exemplaire. En prenant la forme d'un récit fondé sur des souvenirs personnels, la 'description' glisse immédiatement sur un plan idéologique qui s'appuie sur la plupart des lieux

communs du 'discours' colonial. Sans tenir compte du manque de pertinence dans la référence à la 'manière de manger' par rapport au thème du récit (celui de la séparation dans les moyens de transport), on peut observer que le témoignage devient une énumération péremptoire des raisons exactes, concrètes et circonstanciées de la séparation entre les différents groupes. De cette manière, le témoignage finit par se configurer comme un refus qui n'est pas très bien caché, voire obstiné, d'accepter la condition de membre d'une communauté blanche et italienne qui désormais, depuis longtemps, n'est qu'une minorité dans un pays étranger. Bien qu'il s'agisse d'un Italien arrivé en Érythrée en 1946, on peut définir son attitude comme celle d'un 'ex-colonial', si on veut utiliser la même catégorie à laquelle se réfère un autre interlocuteur, un italien qui est né et qui a toujours vécu à Asmara:

Nous appelons ex-coloniaux tous ceux qui ont un âge compris entre soixante-dix et quatre-vingt ans [...] qui sont arrivés en Érythrée avant 1935; mon père, par exemple, n'était pas un colonial parce qu'il était venu après [...]. Un ex-colonial se distingue des autres par sa manière de se comporter face à la population locale. Habités, comme ils étaient, au climat des années vingt, ils s'adressent par exemple à la population en tutoyant immédiatement, comme s'il s'agissait d'un domestique ou d'une femme de ménage. Aujourd'hui, on ne s'adresse plus même pas à eux de cette manière, s'il n'y a pas un rapport de confiance... Même dans les bureaux du gouvernement, ces gens-là se baladent en tutoyant tout le monde: « toi, tu..., tu..., tu... », qu'ils disent... Ils n'arrivent pas à comprendre, ne veulent pas comprendre que la situation n'est plus celle du passé. Ils n'arrivent pas à comprendre qu'ils doivent se comporter comme des Italiens à l'étranger. Ils pensent être chez eux. Autrefois, ils définissaient toutes les colonies comme une partie de l'Italie, un morceau de la nation italienne en dehors de l'Italie, même pas d'outremer', mais comme une partie du territoire métropolitain italien. C'est ce que faisaient les Français ou les Anglais avec leurs colonies. À l'égard de la population locale, ils étaient ceux qui étaient supérieurs. Aujourd'hui, il y a encore d'Italiens ici, à Asmara, qui gardent cette attitude de supériorité. (Vittorio Volpicella)

Il est intéressant que, à partir d'une définition 'technique' du terme qui est ancrée dans une situation historique bien précise, l'interlocuteur étend ce signifié à un type d'attitude, à une modalité typique de se rapporter à un contexte. La manière de construire le texte est significative: le recours à un 'nous' est connoté immédiatement par l'appartenance à une communauté locale, un 'nous' qui se distingue à la fois

d'un 'vous' (dont je fais partie moi-même en tant qu'anthropologue) ('nous ici' par rapport à 'vous ailleurs') et d'un 'eux' (les ex-coloniaux, c'est-à-dire les Italiens qui ont ce type de comportement, contrairement aux Italiens qui ne le font pas). C'est une prise de distance qui, dans les deux cas, a une valeur complètement différente.

En conclusion, pour résumer la question centrale posée tout au long de ce texte, l'un des problèmes, débattu depuis quelque temps en anthropologie, concerne les modalités d'interaction (qui s'établissent entre l'anthropologue et les natifs), le traitement de *la parole d'autrui* et sa restitution dans le texte écrit par l'anthropologue.

En amont, il y a la volonté de certains anthropologues de dévoiler la dimension asymétrique et hiérarchique (qui caractérisait, au début, la recherche sur le terrain), de s'interroger sur la conception multiple de l'altérité et d'apporter une réflexion critique plus approfondie sur le rôle et la signification de la discipline elle-même (à considérer désormais comme historiquement située). Bien qu'elles n'effacent pas la relation asymétrique qui s'instaure entre le chercheur et le natif (car c'est toujours le chercheur qui intervient sur ses « sources »), les histoires de vie permettent d'éviter tout de même que la « parole d'autrui » soit totalement cachée ou phagocytée par les considérations et les réflexions du chercheur. Elle reste là, même si elle est manipulée par le chercheur, prête à susciter d'autres lectures et interprétations. L'anthropologue, dans ce sens là, cesse d'être le seul interprète de la réalité et le seul auteur de son compte rendu ethnographique.

En aval, il reste, toutefois, qu'une symétrie absolue ne peut jamais s'établir pendant l'interlocution, ni après dans la 'fabrication' du texte écrit. Il s'agit, à vrai dire, d'une impasse qu'on ne peut pas surmonter, à moins de renoncer au projet anthropologique de la connaissance de l'altérité qui se fonde, bon gré mal malgré, sur une forme (au moins) minimale de parole et de compréhension avec autrui. C'est précisément parce que je ne veux pas renoncer à cette tension vers une parole et une compréhension communes (qui correspond, par définition, au projet anthropologique), et en ayant conscience que quelqu'un voudra toujours parler pour quelqu'un d'autres, que, malgré les défauts, je continue à accorder ma préférence à l'anthropologie et à pratiquer l'anthropologie.

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### Построение колониальной памяти в Эритрее: эритрейцы, метисы и итальянцы

Основываясь на отрывках некоторых жизнеописаний, собранных в Асмаре и построенных на «итальянских воспоминаниях», в данной статье рассматриваются способы представления прошлого с целью показать, каким образом официальный колониальный дискурс Эритреи влияет на субъективный опыт. Главная цель эссе: понять игру отношений между индивидами и коллективом, существенным элементом в этом анализе является «память» как «социальный выбор воспоминания» (*Halbwachs*). Я пытаюсь связать социальную позицию и нарративную роль отдельных членов общества (Эритреи) с тем, какое значение приобретает «возвращение в прошлое» в связи с настоящим и прошлым их как членов определенной группы (эритрейцев, метисов или итальянцев). Вывод — логика доминирующего/доминируемого недостаточна для объяснения внутренних разграничений колониальной ситуации, и внимание нужно обратить на системы индивидуальных и коллективных ожиданий и на конвенциональные значения, являющиеся результатом представлений о «прошлом, которое нужно открыть» и «настоящем, которое нужно заново построить».

**Koloniaalmälu ehitamine Eritreas:  
eritrealased, mestiitsid ja itaallased**

Keskendudes mõnele Asmaras kogutud ja nõ “Itaalia mälestustele” ehitatud eluloo lõigule, käsitlen käesolevas artiklis mineviku esitamise viise, paljastamaks, kuidas Eritrea ametlik kolonialistlik diskursus mõjutab subjektiivset kogemust. Minu essee põhieesmärk on mõista indiviidide ja kollektiivi vahelist suhtlustemängu ning üheks tähtsaks elemendiks, mida ma selle juures arvestanud olen, on “mälu” kui “mäletamise sotsiaalne valik” (*Halbwachs*). Üritan seostada üksikute (Eritrea ühiskonna) liikmete sotsiaalset positsiooni ning narratiivset rolli sellega, millise tähenduse omandab “minevikku tagasi minemine” seoses oleviku ja minevikuga nende kui teatud gruppi (eritrealaste, mestiitside või itaallaste gruppi) kuuluvate indiviidide jaoks. Järeldus on, et domineerija/domineeritav loogika ei ole koloniaalse situatsiooni sisemiste liigenduste seletamiseks piisav ning tähelepanu tuleb pöörata individuaalsetele ning kollektiivsetele ootuste süsteemidele ja võistlevatele tähendustele, mis tulenevad mõttesüsteemidest “minevik, mida tuleb avastada” ja “olevik, mida tuleb uuesti üles ehitada”.



## Parler de soi pour changer le monde

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**Abstract.** *Speaking about oneself in order to change the world.* Juri Vella is a Forest Nenets reindeer herder, writer and fighter for his people's rights. In his private life, he enjoys silence, as it is a rule in his culture. But the public man, who is graduated from the Literature Institute in Moscow, is aware of the power of speech, and knows how to use it for his goals, to support his vision. He had to realise that the native peoples in Western Siberia have lost much of their skills and acquired none during the Soviet period, in which they were compelled to integrate in the society and to attend Soviet institutions as school or the army. This process has been intensified in the latest fifty years, with the invasion of their traditional territories by oil industry. But Juri Vella expects the oil reserves to finish one day, and then the aborigines will lack the goods bestowed upon them by "Western" society and will have to survive with the help of the traditional skills. He tries to promote his vision of the natives able to live in both worlds and able to recover their dignity. This article analyses his public speech in this behalf and the way Juri Vella speaks about himself, enlarging his "ego" both to his clan and the native peoples in general and connecting it very directly with the space around him. The main sources are Eva Toulouze's fieldwork at Juri Vella's taiga camp, living with the family five months, and the film Liivo Niglas has shot about him in 2003.

Cette étude repose sur les travaux de terrain faits par Eva Toulouze en Sibérie occidentale en 1999 et en 2000, lesquels ont été suivis de contact permanent et de rencontres occasionnelles avec Juri Vella, qui fera l'objet de cet article; Liivo Niglas a eu l'occasion de faire un film à son sujet (Niglas 2003). Nous utilisons de plus ses écrits, métatextes d'œuvres littéraires ou interviews et les enregistrements qu'il a ou que

d'autres ont faits de ses paroles. Nous allons nous arrêter prioritairement sur son discours, mais celui-ci est de manière générale accompagné d'actes, qui en sont indissociables, et qui souvent sont même premiers par rapport au discours lui-même. Comme la parole n'est jamais innocente, nous disposons de sources d'autant plus riches qu'elles sont diverses. Les expériences des deux auteurs de cet article leur ont fourni des occasions fort nombreuses d'être témoins de l'usage par Juri Vella de la parole. Eva Toulouze a passé entre 1999 et 2000 cinq mois chez lui, principalement dans son campement dans la taïga. Elle y a partagé la vie quotidienne du couple, non point en tant que chercheuse intéressée par les Nenets des forêts, mais en tant qu'amie qui venait traduire en français les poèmes du père de famille. Elle était donc en situation privilégiée pour suivre l'expression de Juri Vella dans sa continuité et sans la forcer, puisque sa pratique quotidienne était d'observer et d'écouter plutôt que de poser des questions. Liivo Niglas a connu Juri Vella à Tartu, en Estonie, lors du voyage de celui-ci à l'automne 2000. Il a montré à Juri Vella son film « Une brigade » (Niglas 2000), tourné avec la 7e brigade d'éleveurs de rennes nenets du sovkhose de Jar-Sale, après quoi Juri lui a demandé s'il ne voulait pas faire un film sur les Nenets des forêts. C'est ainsi qu'est né « Le monde de Juri Vella », qui a été une nouvelle occasion pour Juri de s'exprimer.

## 1. Qui est Juri Vella?

Juri Vella est un poète, un éleveur de rennes, un militant nenets. Le petit peuple dont il est issu est celui des Nenets des Forêts, habitants de la taïga de Sibérie Occidentale, qui sont restés longtemps isolés autour des hauts cours des affluents de la rive droite de l'Ob, dans une aire de toundra boisée où alternent forêts, lacs et tourbières et qui est située entre deux unités administratives, l'arrondissement des Khantys et des Mansis et l'arrondissement Yamalo-Nenets. Personne ne peut dire au juste combien ils sont, car ils ne figurent explicitement dans aucun recensement: si le chiffre donné pour les « Nenets » dans les statistiques concernant le premier de ces arrondissements nous donne une indication fiable, puisqu'il n'y a pas dans cet arrondissement d'autre Nenets, le nombre de Nenets des Forêts vivant plus au Nord, dans l'arrondissement Yamalo-Nenets, nous est inconnu, puisque les

recensements ne les distinguent guère de leurs parents Nenets de la toundra, qui y sont largement représentés. Pourtant, les différences entre les deux peuples sont identifiables à l'œil nu: les langues sont suffisamment différentes pour que toute intercompréhension soit exclue, les modes de vie, commandés par l'écosystème dominant, ne peuvent se confondre. Il faut donc se contenter d'évaluations: le nombre total des Nenets des Forêts avoisine vraisemblablement les 2000 personnes.

Dans la région qu'habite Juri Vella, le bassin de l'Agan avec ses affluents, les Nenets des Forêts coexistent depuis au moins près d'un siècle avec les Khantys Orientaux, dits de Surgut. Originellement, ceux-ci habitaient des aires plus méridionales, autour du bas et du moyen cours de l'Agan. Avec l'enracinement du pouvoir soviétique, dans les années trente, puis avec la politique de sédentarisation qui a abouti dans les années cinquante, aussi bien les Khantys que les Nenets ont été rassemblés dans le village de Varjogan et ont dû pour la plupart abandonner complètement leurs campements dans la forêt. Ceci a resserré les liens entre les deux communautés, liens qui existaient déjà dans la première moitié du XXe siècle, puisque Verbov, qui a été le premier à avoir rendu compte dans une étude ethnographique de cette population, mentionne dès 1937 des règles d'exogamie entre les clans nenets et les clans khantys. C'est ainsi que la tradition des mariages mixtes unissant des Khantys de la région de Varjogan à des Nenets de la région de Halesovaja s'est longtemps poursuivie dans le XXe siècle.

Juri Ajvaseda est issu du clan des Vella (cf. infra) et est né dans une famille d'éleveurs de rennes à proximité du village de Varjogan. Son père est mort quand il était très jeune et il est allé vivre au village chez sa grand-mère pour pouvoir aller à l'école. Sa grand-mère Nengi était une personnalité marquante, qui a beaucoup transmis de son savoir à son petit-fils. Juri a quitté le village pour aller faire son lycée à la grande ville de la région, Surgut, mais il n'y a pas trouvé sa place et a arrêté ses études secondaires pour retourner dans sa région. Le début de sa vie d'adulte ne diffère guère de celui d'un habitant ordinaire de ces régions. Il a épousé à dix-neuf ans une femme khanty de son âge dont il a eu quatre filles. Après son service militaire, il a fait plusieurs métiers, collecteur de poisson, facteur, responsable culturel; il a même été maire du village dont sa femme était originaire, Agan. Plus tard il s'est installé dans son village à lui, à

Varjogan, plus au Nord, où il a travaillé comme chasseur dans l'unité économique soviétique d'Etat. En même temps, dans les années 1980, il a fini ses études secondaires pour s'inscrire à Moscou, à l'institut de littérature, où il a suivi les cours de poésie par correspondance. C'est ainsi qu'il a publié en 1990 son premier recueil (Vella 1991a), qui a été suivi de plusieurs autres (Vella 1991b, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2004).

En même temps il s'est fait remarquer dès les années 1980 par une approche originale et combative des problèmes rencontrés par les populations autochtones de la région, soumises à la pression des compagnies pétrolières, qui ont étendu leur champ d'exploitation jusque dans les régions les plus reculées de cette aire. Il a utilisé tous les moyens possibles pour faire valoir les droits des autochtones à vivre sur leurs terres et à protéger la nature, le premier garant de leur existence physique et mentale. Conscient des dangers que court cette même existence, il n'a jamais hésité à porter ses protestations au plus haut niveau, par exemple à écrire au président Putin.

En même temps, il veille à préserver les valeurs qui lui sont chères et à vivre en conformité avec elles. Dans les années 1980, il a été à l'origine de la création d'un musée à Varjogan, lieu qu'il voulait interactif, tourné essentiellement vers la population locale, puisqu'il a fait transporter au village les constructions abandonnées par ses habitants dans la forêt avec le processus de sédentarisation. C'était le début d'une forme de réappropriation par la population de son identité, grâce à ces édifices qui étaient les leurs et qui les rejoignaient au village. Pendant un temps, ce « musée » a vécu, puisque les habitants du village allaient souvent dans leurs maisons, y faire du feu et y boire le thé avec les amis. Mais ce n'était là qu'un pis aller... Juri Vella est allé plus loin. Au début des années 1990 il a acheté une dizaine de rennes, à partir desquelles il a formé un troupeau aujourd'hui d'une bonne taille pour la région, avec lequel il vit dans la taïga avec sa famille.

Cette rapide présentation de l'expérience de Juri Vella servira de cadre à nos propos ultérieurs. En tant que personnalité sociale, en effet, Juri Vella est très souvent amené à prendre la parole en public, à représenter les autochtones de la région, voire à parler en leur nom. En même temps, intellectuel au sens plein du terme, il a sa vision de l'avenir, vision qui l'amène à tenter de préserver les possibilités de choix pour ses successeurs. C'est l'idée qui régit toute son action. Elle s'exprime dans tous ses actes et dans tout son discours.



## **2. Juri Vella et la parole**

Juri Vella est issu d'une culture du silence. Il se plaît souvent à évoquer comment deux Nenets se rencontrant dans la forêt se parlent comme s'ils poursuivaient une conversation depuis longtemps commencée. Le silence est espace de communication, un espace confortable et chaleureux, qui a cependant ces dernières décennies beaucoup souffert du contact avec l'Autre, avec le Russe porteur d'une culture de la parole. Cette deuxième culture, Juri la maîtrise: il a appris à la connaître et à la pratiquer dans les multiples contacts qu'il a eus avec le monde russe depuis son enfance, et il le fait avec un talent nourri de sa pratique universitaire et politique. C'est un orateur remarquable, toujours capable de surprendre son auditoire et de captiver son attention.

Mais dans la vie privée il privilégie le silence. Sa parole est rigoureusement ciblée. Elle est forcément toujours porteuse de message. Qu'elle se déploie dans sa maison avec des visiteurs occasionnels, avec les ethnographes de passage, avec les responsables de l'industrie pétrolière, ou bien dans des colloques internationaux, des assemblées de représentants des peuples premiers etc., elle répond toujours à un objectif précis, elle sert inmanquablement une intention. Jamais Juri Vella n'utilise cet outil de manière banale. Son expression personnelle à lui serait plutôt le silence.

## **3. Parler de soi: un moi double**

Bien sûr, dans ses autobiographies, Juri Vella parle de lui et met en évidence les éléments qui dans son expérience peuvent lui permettre de donner l'exemple. Un exemple en est la phrase suivante:

Je continue même à l'heure actuelle à faire deux choses en même temps: je fais paître mes rennes, et j'enregistre des traditions orales — le miroir du niveau culturel de mon peuple aujourd'hui, avec que tout un chacun puisse regarder dans ce miroir. (Autobiographie, Vella 2004: 126)

La première partie de la phrase met en évidence la dualité inhérente à l'expérience autochtone au XXe siècle, dans cette période au cours de laquelle les fondements même de l'identité autochtone ont été mis en



cause par l'invasion de l'Autre et par la domination que celui-ci a imposée. Jamais en effet la domination n'a été aussi marquée que dans la deuxième partie du XXe siècle. Si pendant l'époque tsariste, voire au début de l'ère soviétique, l'Autre exerçait une autorité sur le cadre extérieur de la vie des populations Nenets et Khanty, fixant les règles dans les rapports entre elles et ses propres structures, la pénétration soviétique a eu une double incidence: tout d'abord l'éloignement géographique a cessé d'être un facteur de protection, puisque l'exploitation des ressources naturelles n'a pas épargné les recoins les plus reculés de ce gigantesque réservoir de pétrole qu'est la Sibérie Occidentale. Donc le flux migratoire a pénétré absolument partout, il n'est plus un seul endroit qui puisse servir de refuge aux populations autochtones. Deuxièmement, de par sa vocation totalitaire, le régime soviétique ne se contentait pas de demander une allégeance formelle à ses règles: il voulait coloniser les cœurs et les esprits. Il aspirait ni plus ni moins à transformer le rapport des citoyens soviétiques au monde. Il a donc entrepris de toucher et de façonner tout le monde, y compris les populations autochtones de la toundra et de la taïga. Celles-ci, aujourd'hui, héritent d'un double patrimoine: celui transmis par leur culture héréditaire, qui est parvenu jusqu'à elles de manière plus ou moins développée, et celui inculqué par l'école soviétique, par l'armée, par la vie dans le cadre du kolkhoze, qui a perduré suffisamment pour avoir laissé une empreinte indélébile. Aucun de ces deux univers n'est aujourd'hui, comme ils l'étaient jadis, imperméable à l'autre: avec leur nature contradictoire, ils coexistent dans les consciences qui se trouvent ainsi tiraillées et cherchent des solutions pour les concilier.

Cette dualité est portée à son comble chez Juri. En effet, non seulement il est porteur de la tradition nenets qui lui est chère, mais il a mené plus loin que personne parmi les Autochtones de la région la connaissance de la culture russe, ayant fait des études universitaires qui l'ont initié aux valeurs les plus universelles de cette tradition intellectuelle et artistique. C'est finalement cette dualité qu'il matérialise dans la formule par laquelle il résume son activité. La première partie de sa phrase est « je fais paître mes rennes»: voilà le symbole s'il en est de la culture traditionnelle. A la fin du XXe siècle et au début du XXIe, l'élevage de rennes est devenu le signe distinctif de l'autochtone représentatif des peuples du Nord. Et cela même chez des peuples pour qui l'élevage des rennes n'a pas eu historiquement la même importance que chez les Nenets de la toundra, comme chez les

Khantys ou les Nenets des forêts. Pour ces deux peuples, en effet, l'élevage des rennes n'était, au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, qu'une activité de subsistance parmi d'autres, comme la chasse, la pêche ou la cueillette, et certainement pas la plus importante. Pendant la plus grande partie du siècle, les rennes avaient comme fonction essentielle de servir de moyen de transport, la fonction alimentaire n'étant que seconde. Il est vrai que la modernité n'a fait que réduire le rôle effectif du renne dans la subsistance — en Sibérie Occidentale, et plus précisément dans la région de Juri Vella, l'attelage de rennes a cessé d'être le moyen de transport ordinaire, tant le scooter des neiges et la voiture tous terrains sont présents dans l'économie des foyers, et la part de la viande de renne dans l'alimentation, qui intègre de plus en plus d'éléments d'importation, a certainement diminué. Ce qui a en revanche augmenté, c'est la valeur symbolique du renne comme marqueur identitaire. J'ai été frappée de noter que dans les récits que la mère de Juri fait de sa migration entre le bassin du Pur et le bassin de l'Agan, quand elle était enfant, le quotidien qu'elle évoque semble bien plus proche de celui des Nenets de la toundra — dont toute l'existence tourne autour des rennes — que de la culture dont elle est elle-même issue.

Juri, d'après ses paroles, fait deux choses: non seulement il fait paître ses rennes, mais aussi il enregistre des traditions orales. Artifice de style, car il a bien d'autres activités — il écrit des poèmes, des livres, il milite pour la cause des autochtones. Mais toutes ces autres activités relèvent de sa deuxième identité, façonnée par la modernité et par le monde russe. Certaines sont ambivalentes: le militantisme, ainsi que la collecte de folklore, qu'il fait ressortir dans son autobiographie et qui mettent directement les deux univers en relation. Juri Vella est un intellectuel conscient: s'il fait le choix de cette activité parmi d'autres, c'est qu'à elles deux, elles résument ce qu'il veut faire savoir, faire comprendre de lui-même, l'image qu'il veut façonner à usage externe. La collecte des traditions orales relève de l'entre-deux, c'est une activité de conciliation, d'adaptation entre les deux univers qui le déchirent. Elle a pour centre de gravité la culture autochtone, mais l'aborde avec un regard qui lui est toutefois extérieur.

Enfin, la métaphore du miroir fait référence à la réconciliation de l'Autochtone avec lui-même. Ces populations, coincées au milieu du gué, ne savent plus qui elles sont. La société dominante joue le rôle d'un miroir déformant: elle leur renvoie une image trouble et

grotesque d'elles-mêmes, les amenant à se voir comme des barbares en puissance. C'est ainsi que l'un des Nenets les plus instruits de Varjogan, Vladimir Talevič Ajvaseda, m'a expliqué un jour le plus sérieusement du monde que le Nenets étaient des représentants de la « société primitive », reprenant à son compte le discours « scientifique » soviétique sur les peuples premiers. Le miroir que Juri Vella entend leur proposer est un miroir valorisant, un miroir reflétant les valeurs originales des Nenets des Forêts, leurs valeurs intrinsèques. Un miroir qui fixe de manière précise les cadres de leur identité.

#### 4. Parler de soi: un moi élargi

Quand Juri parle de lui, il ne parle jamais que de lui. Lui, c'est toujours un être en osmose avec les autres, avec les « siens ». Un être qui sert de prétexte.

Juri se définit tout d'abord, comme tout autochtone de Sibérie occidentale, par le clan. Les noms de clan sont d'ailleurs en Russie devenus des noms de famille, ce qui permet, sauf accident, d'identifier aussitôt une personne par son clan. Sauf accident: en effet, l'histoire de la famille de Juri comporte un épisode en fait non élucidé, qui fait que son nom de famille officiel n'est pas celui de son clan:

Sur mon passeport, mon nom de famille est Ajvaseda, mais tous m'appellent Juri Vella. Et ce n'est pas seulement un pseudonyme littéraire, c'est là le véritable nom de famille de notre clan.

Les interprétations diffèrent sur l'origine de ce décalage: d'après certaines versions les Vella aussi bien que les Tjott étaient très pauvres, ils étaient arrivés à la fin des années 1920 dans la région de l'Agan, qui était peu habitée et riche en poissons et en gibier, et ils séjournaient chez les Ajvaseda, clan local. Pour que ceux-ci ne soient pas accusés d'être des exploiters, ils ont présenté au recensement local les nouveaux venus comme étant de leur famille. D'après une autre version, les Vella et les Tjott étaient arrivés dans la région en provenance de la région de Num-to, après le soulèvement de 1933-34. Ils fuyaient les persécutions qui avaient touché l'ensemble des autochtones de cette région et pour ne pas se faire identifier, ils s'étaient présentés sous l'identité des Ajvaseda. C'est ainsi que tous

ont été recensés sous le nom d'Ajvaseda. Et quand son père a épousé sa mère, tous ceux qui ignoraient cette histoire ont été scandalisés. Or sa mère appartenait au clan Tjott et son père était un Vella.

Donc, d'emblée, parler de soi revient à parler de l'histoire de la région, de ses péripéties souvent douloureuses, au cours de l'époque soviétique. Parler de soi, pour Juri Vella, c'est aussi parler des personnes de son clan:

Je n'ai que cinquante ans, mais depuis des années je suis le chef de mon clan. Ce n'est pas naturel. Pourquoi ? Parce que tous les hommes de mon clan ont été détruits par l'alcool. Il ne reste plus que moi, un cousin qui est en prison pour avoir blessé un homme alors qu'il était en état d'ivresse, et un enfant de trois ans. (Travaux de terrain mars 1999)

Cette histoire non plus n'est pas innocente: elle sert d'exemple édifiant à ses invités. Elle a été racontée un jour dans son campement, alors qu'il venait d'accueillir deux voitures de visiteurs russes qui lui apportaient en cadeau de la vodka. Il a convoqué tout le monde dans sa maison et a « joué » les chefs de tribu. Il leur a parlé des règles de la vie dans la forêt et a voulu leur faire comprendre qu'avec ce type de cadeau, ils alimentaient l'alcoolisme qui détruit de l'intérieur les communautés autochtones. Juri lui-même ne boit pas...

## **5. Au-delà du clan**

Le sens d'appartenance du moi dépasse largement les limites du clan. Le « moi » englobe certes la famille, comme il le dit en russe « moi rodstvenniki ». Mais les limites du clan ou de la famille sont larges et inclusives: on le voit bien dans un passage du « Monde de Juri Vella », où il parle du sort de gens de « sa famille ». Or parmi les « gens de sa famille », il cite nominativement son père et Aleksandr Aipin. Cette citation est intéressante pour tous ceux qui connaissent la Sibérie occidentale et la répartition des clans par peuple et par région. Les Aipin, en effet, sont des Khanty. Ils ne sont guère apparentés par le sang aux Nenets et Juri Vella n'a pas de sang khanty, même si sa mère est remariée à un Khanty, un Kazamkin.

Cela montre clairement comment pour Juri Vella, la frontière du moi est flexible: face au monde extérieur, son tout premier « moi » est



caractérisé par l'identité de l'autochtone par rapport au nouveau venu, au Russe ou à l'Européen de manière générale. Dans cette région d'interpénétration Nenets-Khanty, les « miens » ne sont plus seulement les Nenets, mais aussi les Khantys. Il est fort possible que ce soit là la conséquence d'une perte partielle d'identité, due à la pression exercée sur les autochtones par une colonisation russe de plus en plus envahissante ; les Nenets sont d'ailleurs, dans la région de l'Agan, en minorité par rapport aux Khantys et ils se fondent effectivement dans la masse des autochtones. Mais sans doute, avant tout, le fait est qu'aujourd'hui, l'opposition principale n'est plus (comme elle l'a été pendant longtemps, comme nous le révèle le folklore) entre ethnies autochtones, mais bien entre les nouveaux venus et les populations locales, Nenets et Khantys réunis. D'ailleurs cette évocation de Kyli Vella et d'Aleksandr Aipin intervenait comme illustration dans une histoire édifiante elle aussi: Juri Vella expliquait qu'il fallait savoir s'arrêter à temps. Il expliquait comment chaque individu a une mesure qu'il doit respecter. Lui-même étant chasseur, il avait abattu près de 200 zibelines quand il a senti que sa mesure était pleine. Qu'il devait s'arrêter. Il a écouté cette « voix » et est devenu éleveur de rennes. Or Kyli Vella et Aleksandr Aipin n'ont pas écouté cette voix et ne se sont pas arrêtés. Ils sont morts jeunes tous les deux... Analogie avec les extracteurs de pétrole: s'ils ne s'arrêtent pas à temps, ce sont eux qui risquent gros.

C'est ainsi que Juri Vella profite de cette expérience: expérience individuelle vécue autour de lui, qu'il élargit d'abord à lui-même et qu'il assume pour faire passer des messages de manière imagée et expressive.

## 6. Un moi spatial

Souvent, la narration de soi est une histoire qui s'articule sur l'axe du temps. Chez Juri Vella aussi d'ailleurs, quand on lui demande de raconter sa vie. Mais une autre dimension semble être tout aussi importante: l'espace. D'une certaine manière, pour lui, le temps se traduit de manière plus intelligible et plus proche, en espace.

Son activité préférée, quand il a des invités, c'est de les promener dans l'espace qui est le sien et de le leur déchiffrer comme une



partition. Le rapport du moi et de l'espace est polysémique. L'espace est en même temps présence, absence et mémoire.

L'espace présence: c'est la mise en rapport de la vie des siens et de son moi. Le jour où Juri Vella a décidé d'arrêter de chasser et de réaliser son rêve, de consacrer sa vie à un troupeau de rennes, il est allé s'installer sur les terres où ses grands-parents avaient séjourné: ce sont des espaces qui sont plus identité que propriété. La propriété de la terre est une notion inconnue des peuples du Nord. La terre s'appartient à elle-même, ce sont plutôt les hommes qui lui appartiennent. C'est cette conception, qui n'est pas à proprement parler proclamée, qui sous-tend la démarche de Juri Vella retournant avec ses rennes sur les terres qui avaient nourri les rennes de ses ancêtres. Cela apparaît on ne peut plus explicitement dans le film de Liivo Niglas, où Juri Vella conduit le cinéaste à un endroit où il lui montre l'espace habité par ses grands-parents: la caméra ne distingue rien de spécial, mais tout s'anime comme sur le visage de Juri Vella en gros plan. C'est là aussi que le chamane avait prédit la naissance de Juri: il avait annoncé, bien avant que l'enfant n'ait été conçu, que le couple n'aurait qu'un fils et que le père mourrait jeune. De la fusion avec l'espace découle aussi la justification de sa propre existence, la prédiction du chamane. Par là même, le diplômé de l'Institut Gorki de Moscou balise sa filiation, son lien organique avec la culture traditionnelle niée par les conceptions dominantes. En même temps, dans la brève histoire de sa grand-mère, depuis son mariage jusqu'à la sédentarisation, il résume de manière particulièrement frappante toute la tragédie qui a touché les autochtones de Sibérie occidentale: il sait à quel point les faits nus, dépourvus de tout mélodrame, ignorant les trémolos dans la voix, sont de nature à marquer son interlocuteur de manière particulière. Juri Vella affectionne le laconisme: loin d'assumer une tonalité de type « J'accuse », il laisse ses interlocuteurs tirer leurs conclusions.

Mais aujourd'hui, l'espace est aussi synonyme d'absence, de perte. Dans l'espace qu'il nous indique dans le film, on ne distingue rien de spécial. Mais les flammèches de gaz des industries pétrolières sont omniprésentes. Ces terres dont les autochtones nomades assuraient traditionnellement la couverture sont aujourd'hui autrement couvertes: en parcourant en hélicoptère les espaces de Sibérie occidentale, l'œil distingue toujours, sans répit, une tour de forage quelque part à l'horizon. Ce sont deux conceptions de la terre qui s'affrontent: celle

pour laquelle la terre ne se partage pas et celle pour laquelle la terre, si elle n'a pas de propriétaire explicite, est exploitable à merci. Aux yeux des autochtones, il s'est produit un véritable viol. Les nouveaux venus ont envahi forêt, lacs, marais, les ont coupés, perforés, creusés, ils ont construit et par là même démoli. A huit kilomètres du village de Varjogan, où les autochtones de la région ont été relogés, il y a un bourg construit dans les années 1960, Novoagansk. C'est là qu'il y a l'hôpital, la poste, etc. Une partie de l'univers de Juri Vella. Au moment du tournage, il y avait une fête pour l'anniversaire de la compagnie pétrolière de la région. L'occasion pour Juri Vella d'évoquer son enfance, ses souvenirs personnels: sur l'emplacement de Novoagansk, il y avait les terres du clan Aipin. Cette phrase suffit. Et surtout l'expression résignée de son visage. Autour de lui, des bouteilles vides éparpillées, et la musique de la fête, retentissant à tue-tête. C'est une terrible violence qui transparaît dans cette juxtaposition. Par là Juri Vella entend toucher ceux qui sont disposés à entendre son message: il contredit le discours stéréotypé des porteurs de la culture occidentale, qui, en toute bonne foi, raconte la saga des constructeurs, qui ont fait surgir la civilisation là où il n'y avait rien. En effet, pour les Occidentaux — c'est à dire, dans ce contexte, pour les Russes — là où il n'y a pas de construction, là où ils ne voient que de la nature, il n'y a rien. Pour les autochtones, tout l'espace est signifiant, animé — par les esprits à tout endroit, par leurs dieux dans les lieux sacrés, par eux-mêmes aux endroits où ils montaient leur campement, par le souvenir des ancêtres qui chassaient l'élan à tel ou tel endroit, qui mettaient des pièges à loutres à tel autre emplacement etc.

Cela nous amène à l'espace mémoire: Juri Vella est avant tout obsédé par la transmission de la mémoire d'aujourd'hui projetée sur demain. L'une de ses dernières œuvres, à laquelle il travaille depuis 2000, c'est un dictionnaire toponymique de sa région, le bassin de l'Agan avec ses affluents. Il a commencé à rédiger cet ouvrage en trois langues: en nenets, en khanty et en russe, les trois langues parlées dans la région. En effet, les lieux ont été appelés de manières souvent différentes par les locuteurs des trois langues. Ces noms évoquent des légendes, le passage de telle ou telle personne, les habitudes de tel ou tel clan. Juri Vella indique pour chaque endroit les noms nenets, khanty et russes, et il les commente chacun dans sa langue. Il est vrai qu'il ajoute en général en russe un résumé de ce qu'il a écrit dans ses autres langues, mais il tient à ce que le texte développé reste original,

intégral dans la langue dans laquelle il a été à l'origine conçu. L'idée qui préside à cette entreprise, c'est de préserver la mémoire des liens des autochtones avec ces terres, afin qu'un jour, dans quelques générations éventuellement, ses descendants puissent avoir des pièces à conviction prouvant qu'ils ont des droits à l'utilisation de ces terres. Cette idée lui vient sans doute de ce qu'il a entendu au cours de son voyage aux USA sur les pratiques des militants amérindiens.

## **7. Un chaînon entre passé et avenir**

Comme Juri Vella l'explique dans le film de Liivo Niglas, il a une vision sombre de l'avenir. Pour l'instant, le Nord est utile à la Russie, l'argent coule à flots. Mais un jour les ressources naturelles finiront par s'épuiser et cette région n'intéressera plus personne. Ceux qui sont venus peupler le Nord repartiront vers des zones plus prospères et plus faciles, et il ne restera plus que les autochtones qui n'ont aucun autre endroit où aller. Ce jour-là, les savoir-faire issus de la tradition redeviendront essentiels pour la survie. Il ne faut donc pas qu'ils se perdent.

Pour cela Juri Vella se voit comme un chaînon entre un passé proche — où les savoir-faire étaient encore répandus — et l'avenir, où ils risquent de redevenir d'actualité. Pour remplir sa fonction, il est présent sur deux tableaux. Donner à ses petits-enfants toutes les chances d'une part, et tenter de se faire comprendre des autres, des gens de l'extérieur d'autre part.

## **8. Préserver toutes les chances**

C'est maintenant sur ses petits-enfants qu'il se projette. Juri doit constater qu'il a raté le coche avec ses propres enfants. Ses filles sont nées alors que le militant n'était pas encore suffisamment mûr. Peut-être Juri Vella croyait-il encore aux bienfaits de l'éducation soviétique. Il n'a pas essayé de leur donner une éducation traditionnelle. Toutes, elles n'ont comme langue maternelle que le russe, et elles sont fort peu sensibles à leur identité d'autochtones. D'ailleurs aucune d'entre elles n'échappe entièrement au fléau de l'Arctique, à l'alcoolisme qui fait des ravages. Juri Vella a pu voir les résultats de

cette formation donnée par l'école qui laisse les autochtones désarmés au milieu du gué: elle parvient à façonner leur vision du monde et leurs aspirations de sorte que tous mettent en cause les notions traditionnelles, qu'ils perdent tout respect et toute sensibilité envers ce qui a fait la vie de leur peuple. Et que donne-t-elle à la place ? Rien. Ce n'est pas l'école qui leur ouvre les yeux sur les véritables richesses de la culture russe, sur les valeurs les plus humaines de l'idéologie dominante. Elle se limite à détruire, sans rien mettre à la place. Comme le dit souvent Juri Vella, les enfants, en sortant de l'école, sont incapables de vivre de manière autonome dans la forêt.

Alors Juri Vella a mis son autorité, son prestige, au service de ses petits-enfants: il a ouvert dans son campement une école primaire. Pour que les enfants s'habituent à la vie dans la nature, sans pour autant perdre les avantages de la formation scolaire ordinaire. Il s'est battu avec les autorités et a obtenu non seulement l'autorisation, mais également les fonds pour faire vivre cette petite école. Réalisant ainsi pour ses petits-enfants le rêve qui était le sien quand il allait à l'école, à l'internat de Varjogan: regarder par la fenêtre et voir des rennes. Il tient à ce qu'ils aient le choix: continuer des études, vivre une vie urbaine s'ils le désirent, ou bien rester dans la forêt, élever des rennes, poursuivre avec dignité une vie traditionnelle alliée aux avantages du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle.

En même temps, il déclare souvent, en parlant de lui, que sa vie est un musée. Ainsi il réalise le deuxième volet de son aspiration: essayer de faire comprendre à l'Autre la valeur de son héritage et l'importance de le préserver. Et là, son discours sur sa vie rejoint le vécu quotidien. Sa vie dans la forêt, dans son campement avec son troupeau de rennes, est une construction qui vise à imiter le réel. Ce n'est pas réellement la vie suivant les traditions: il lui manque la spontanéité au quotidien. Juri n'effectue pas les gestes qu'il effectue parce que ce sont les siens et qu'il ne pourrait pas en avoir d'autres. La vie lui en a appris bien des différents. Il fait un choix conscient, celui de vivre suivant des règles qu'il a la possibilité de renier. Ce n'est pas en même temps une vie faussée, car ces gestes, il les connaît réellement depuis son enfance, ils sont enracinés en lui. Mais il les accomplit consciemment. Dans un but: celui de donner l'exemple. De montrer à tous qu'on peut vivre dans la taïga au XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle une vie digne et confortable, qui a des valeurs à enseigner à l'homme urbain du même siècle. Il n'est pas en mesure de construire une vraie vie: c'est particulièrement difficile



quand on est entouré de gisements de pétrole. Surtout, il n'a personne qui partage sa vision: ses filles avec leurs familles séjournent de temps à autre dans son campement, mais rapidement sont davantage attirées par la vie au village, avec le chauffage central, la télévision et la vodka. Sa femme ne partage pas plus que lui sa vision. Mais elle le suit, en bonne épouse: elle, elle vit réellement sa vie dans le présent. De ce point de vue, elle ne lui donne pas seulement le soutien de principe que son rôle lui confère, mais aussi, elle représente l'élément de réalité: Juri est condamné à ne cesser de jouer son propre rôle ; son épouse vit.

C'est pour leur montrer cette vie qu'il invite dans son campement tous les gens qu'il a l'occasion de rencontrer: les Khantys et les Nenets du village et des alentours, des Russes de Sibérie, des Russes du reste du pays, sans parler des étrangers, Allemands, Français, Néerlandais, Estoniens, Américains, et d'autres encore. Il les invite à regarder ce qu'est la vie autochtone, à être séduits par son charme, il leur révèle toutes les astuces, les savoir faire qu'il faut maîtriser, l'extraordinaire rationalité du mode de vie traditionnel. Il tient à ce qu'en repartant, ses visiteurs aient acquis non seulement une compréhension approfondie de sa culture, mais aussi un respect réel à son égard. Il espère contribuer à changer les attitudes dominantes envers les peuples premiers de Sibérie. Afin de rendre possible leur survie.

Juri Vella vit donc en se racontant, exposé en permanence à son propre regard *sub speciem aeternitatis*. C'est du point de vue de l'avenir qu'il se regarde vivre et qu'il opère. Il impose une rude charge à ses proches, mais il a tout investi dans sa vision. Il ne compte pas de résultats dans le présent. Il n'espère sans doute pas en voir: il investit pour l'avenir, en espérant semer des graines qui germeront — peut-être — un jour.

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### Говорить о себе, чтобы изменить мир

Лесной ненец Юрий Велла является оленоводом, писателем и правозащитником. В своей частной жизни он наслаждается тишиной, как это принято в его культуре. Но как участник публичной жизни, который окончил Московский Литинститут, он знает силу слова и умеет это использовать в интересах своего дела. Он осознал, что коренные народы Западной Сибири растеряли большинство своих прошлых навыков и при этом не приобрели новых за годы советской власти, когда им приходилось участвовать в работе советских институций (например в школах и в армии). Последние пятьдесят лет, когда их территорию захватила нефтепромышленность, только ускорили этот процесс. По мнению Юрия Веллы, однажды нефть кончится и коренным жителям, лишившимся благ западного общества, придется тогда выживать при помощи своего традиционного образа жизни. Велла делится своим видением коренных жителей, которые способны жить в обоих мирах и смогут отвоевать свое достоинство. Настоящая статья анализирует речь Веллы на данную тему и то, как Велла говорит о себе, распространяя свое «эго» как на свое племя так и на коренных жителей в целом, связывая это с окружающим пространством. Главным материалом для статьи послужила полевая работа Эвы Тулуз в таежном лагере Веллы, где она проживала с его семьей 5 месяцев, и фильм Лийво Нигласа, снятый им в 2003 году.

### Rääkida endast, et muuta maailma

Juri Vella on metsaneenetsite soost põhjapõdrakasvataja, kirjanik ja inimõiguslane. Oma eraelus naudib ta vaikust, nii nagu ta kultuuris kombeks on. Kuid avaliku elu tegelasena, kes on lõpetanud Moskva Kirjandusinstituudi, on ta teadlik kõne mõjust ning oskab seda enda ja oma nägemuse huvides ära kasutada. Tal on tulnud mõista, et Lääne-Siberi põlisrahvad on kaotanud enamuse oma kunagistest oskustest, kuid pole Nõukogude perioodil, mil nad olid sunnitud ühiskonda sulanduma ning pidid

osalema Nõukogude institutsioonide töös (näiteks koolides ja sõjaväes), midagi juurde õppinud. Viimased viiskümmend aastat, mil nende traditsioonilistele elualadele on tunginud naftatööstus, on seda protsessi vaid kiirendanud. Kuid Juri Vella arvates lõppevad ühel heal päeval naftavarud ning kuivõrd pärismaalased jäävad siis ilma hüvedest, mida "lääne" ühiskond neile seni jaganud on, tuleb neil traditsiooniliste oskuste abil elus püsida. Vella jutlustab nägemust põliselanikest, kes on võimelised elama mõlemas maailmas ning suudavad oma väarikuse tagasi võita. Käesolev artikkel analüüsib Juri Vella kõnet sellel teemal ning seda, kuidas Vella räägib iseendast, laiendades oma "ego" nii oma hõimule kui põlisrahvastele üldse ja seostab seda väga tihedalt end ümbritseva ruumiga. Põhilisteks materjaliallikateks käesolevale artiklile on Eva Toulouze'i välitööd Juri Vella taigalaagris, kus Eva Toulouze elas koos Vella perega viis kuud, ning 2003. aastal Liivo Niglase poolt Vellast vändatud film.

## **De la sémiotique de la représentation théâtrale à l'anthropologie culturelle: Pourquoi le théâtre (résiste)?**

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**Abstract.** *From the semiotics of theatrical representation to cultural anthropology or why theater (resists)?* In this paper I propose an epistemological approach to the field of theatre semiotics from the beginning of the 20th century to our days. Firstly, I point out two different periods that have influenced theatre semiotics. The first one centres on reflections and studies by the Prague School of Structuralism. More precisely, I address Jan Mukařovsky's essays about art and society as well as Jindrich Honzl's contributions to the study of sign and system in theatre. The second period presented here is that of theatre semiotics in the early 70s and late 80s in France.

My goal here is to expose the main reasons that led theatre semiotics to a deadlock in the early 90s. Theatre semiotic research has been rich and fruitful in the beginning of last century. However, in our days it is generally deemed unadvisable to describe theatre representation in terms of sign and system. Although theatre semiotics used to be presented in French university classes, it is no longer possible to do so.

Even though general semiotics has progressed by denying the importance of structure and by refusing to search for the minimal sign and its code, theatre semiotics has remained faithful to old communicational semiotics research.

Throughout my contribution, I would like to examine the kind of semiotic field best fit to approaching an artistic domain such as theatre. In other words, I would like to show that Western theatre, granted it can be seen as a semiotic object, is first and foremost an artistic and cultural one.

In order to do so, I propose a theoretical and methodological framework based on a specific semiotic model: the "indicial semiology" proposed by Anne-Marie Houdebine. Inspired by Juri Lotman's essays about culture and art, I will try to set "indicial semiology" in the general field of a cultural anthropology.

## Introduction

Penser le théâtre en tant qu'objet sémiotique, culturel et artistique est l'objectif de cette contribution. Pour ce faire, nous allons suivre deux voies. Dans un premier temps, nous souhaitons tracer, brièvement, le parcours effectué par la sémiologie appliquée au théâtre depuis le début du vingtième siècle jusqu'à nos jours. Par la suite, nous allons mettre l'accent sur la nécessité d'ouvrir la recherche théâtrale vers un champ plus vaste, à savoir l'anthropologie culturelle. Il nous semble donc important d'observer d'une part les *espaces théâtraux possibles* dans lesquels la sémiologie peut intervenir. D'autre part, d'évoquer certains problèmes que le chercheur rencontre lorsqu'il pense l'oeuvre artistique et culturel sous l'angle de la sémiologie.

Selon Roland Barthes (1964: 268) "le théâtre constitue un objet sémiologique privilégié puisque son système est apparemment original (polyphonique) par rapport à celui de la langue (qui est linéaire)". En effet, un très grand nombre de recherches sur le signe et le système théâtral témoignent de l'intérêt de penser le théâtre comme un objet sémiotique. Les premières recherches sur ce qui peut définir la structure du théâtre occidental datent des années 1930 et des travaux de l'École de Prague.

Depuis les années 1960 et jusqu'au milieu des années 1980, la sémiologie théâtrale a occupé une place très importante aussi bien dans la recherche que dans l'enseignement universitaire. Nous soulignons, à titre indicatif, les travaux d'Anne Ubersfeld, de Tadeusz Kowzan et de Patrice Pavis.

En revanche, depuis les années 1990, la sémiologie appliquée au théâtre trouve difficilement sa place dans le discours scientifique. Ce dernier défend l'impossibilité de penser la représentation théâtrale en termes de système ainsi que de postuler le fonctionnement du signe théâtral. La question que nous souhaitons donc poser vise, d'une part, aux raisons ayant provoqué ce rejet, voire refus d'une sémiologie du théâtre. D'autre part, elle met l'accent sur la possibilité actuelle d'une

sémiologie théâtrale allant vers une anthropologie culturelle. Nous exposons ci-dessous — de façon à la fois sélective et pertinente — le parcours tracé par la sémiologie théâtrale. Aussi présentons-nous deux étapes distinctes *des* sémiologies théâtrales pratiquées en Europe depuis le postulat de cette science par Ferdinand de Saussure (1916: 33).

## 1. Les recherches en sémiologie théâtrale en Europe

### 1.1. L'École de Prague

Parmi les structuralistes de l'École de Prague, Jan Mukařovský pense le théâtre aussi bien comme un objet sémiotique que social et esthétique. Plus précisément, les travaux de Mukařovský accentuent la nécessité de relier le signe théâtral à l'esthétique et par là, de rendre compte du caractère dissociable entre le rationnel et le sensible, présents à la fois à l'intérieur d'une mise en scène. De là, Mukařovský observe en parallèle deux dimensions essentielles de la représentation théâtrale. D'une part, il évoque le fonctionnement interne de la mise en scène. D'autre part, il s'intéresse au récepteur du message théâtral, autrement dit, à la *conscience* du public.

En reliant de façon étroite ces deux dimensions, nous déduisons deux points pertinents. D'abord, nous observons que les évolutions sociales jouent un rôle important et sont ainsi capables d'influencer les valeurs esthétiques de la réception théâtrale. Pour Mukařovský (1936: 81) "la valeur esthétique est un procès dont le déroulement est déterminé d'une part par l'évolution immanente de la structure elle-même et d'autre part par le mouvement et les modifications de la structure de la vie sociale des hommes". Nous soulignons donc qu'une place importante est accordée aux acquis sociaux et culturels du public sans pour autant que le postulat de système et de règles soit occulté.

Un peu plus tard, un confrère de Mukařovský, à savoir Jindřich Honzl (1940), va mettre l'accent sur la notion de *circularité du système théâtral*. Cette dernière s'organise autour de deux points.

Le premier défend l'idée que le signe d'un système théâtral possède une dynamique et que cette dynamique est susceptible de produire plusieurs significations. Honzl refuse alors toute dominance du signe sur le spectateur. En postulant la polysémie du signe dans le



théâtre occidental, Honzl annonce l'ouverture de l'oeuvre artistique, ouverture que nous retrouvons dans les travaux de Julia Kristeva et d'Umberto Eco pour ce qui est de l'oeuvre littéraire et artistique.

L'idée que le signe théâtral est circulaire met l'accent sur le fait que les éléments de la structure scénique sont capables de remplir une fonction signifiante. Ce qui veut dire que le système théâtral est structuré et ordonné. Mais ce qui veut dire aussi qu'aucun des éléments de ce système n'est étranger à la production du sens. C'est à partir de ce constat que Honzl défend l'idée qu'un système théâtral peut être solide ou mobile.

### 1.2. Système solide vs système mobile

Un système solide présente des règles fermes, préalablement posées. Un système mobile est un système en cours de construction et induit une polysémie très importante. Selon Honzl, la structure du théâtre occidental est essentiellement mobile. Cette opposition entre structure solide et structure mobile est implicitement suggérée à travers les deux grandes tendances de la sémiotique de la culture — extensive et intensive — citées par Jacques Fontanille (2004: 9) dans sa préface de *L'explosion et la culture* de Juri Lotman (2004).

Si la *culture extensive* est définie par ses objets et ses pratiques, Fontanille (2004: 9) dit que ceux-ci doivent être décrits préalablement. Ils doivent être préalablement répertoriés comme culturels. De cette manière, une culture extensive concernerait des systèmes théâtraux solides, dont le code et le fonctionnement seraient définis au préalable. Elle pourrait éventuellement se référer à des formes théâtrales comme le *Nô*, le *Kabuki* ou bien la *Commedia dell'Arte*. Cependant, nous devons prendre en considération le fait que le théâtre n'est pas seulement un objet culturel. Il est aussi possiblement un objet artistique, et que même à l'intérieur des objets fortement codés, pour qu'il y ait art, il y a nécessairement, perturbation et réinvention, voire subversion du code.

En ce qui concerne la *culture intensive*, Fontanille écrit qu'elle est

considérée comme une activité globale de production, un champ dynamique réglé par des lois générales et par les propriétés syntagmatiques d'une *praxis*, qui définissent ce qu'est une culture indépendamment des objets et des pratiques qui la constituent; dans ce cas, chaque culture particulière est définie

par les règles spécifiques qui en contrôlent le champ dynamique. Et inversement, les objets et pratiques ne sont reconnus comme culturels que dans la mesure où ils sont soumis à ces règles spécifiques. (Fontanille 2004: 9)

Nous pouvons dire qu'il n'en va pas différemment de l'objet théâtral dont la structure est essentiellement mobile et dont les objets sont marqués par leur caractère dynamique.

À travers la thèse de Honzl (1940) nous observons également une éventualité de lien sémiologique, la notion de système solide et de système mobile renvoyant possiblement à la notion de structure ferme et structure souple défendue par Anne-Marie Houdebine (1994). Intégrées dans la problématique d'une théorie sémiologique générale dite *sémiologie des indices* (Houdebine 1994: 43–46), la *structure ferme* est l'espace où les règles sont préalablement répertoriées, codées ainsi que classées comme culturelles. Cette structure ferme a toujours intéressé la sémiologie de la communication. En revanche, une *structure souple*, appelée aussi *structuration*, renverrait à la notion de culture intensive, dans laquelle aucune forme signifiante n'est construite au préalable, aucun signe n'est défendu dans sa binarité au préalable, non plus décrit en fonction d'un code préexistant. Lorsque le système d'un objet sémiotique est structuré par des éléments formels qu'Anne-Marie Houdebine appelle des *signifiants indiciels*, nous sommes face à des *structurations*. Selon Anne-Marie Houdebine le signifiant indiciel

est défini comme proto-signifiant (signifiant à construire) ou indice, voire signifiant indiciel quand la structure est ouverte et que la relation forme/sens est à construire et non à dégager, c'est-à-dire quand on n'a pas affaire à un code social quasi livrant des unités ou à des signes symboliques, arbitraires et conventionnels. (Houdebine 1999: 220)

Il s'agit donc des éléments présentant une dynamique et qui par conséquent pourraient conduire à ce que Juri Lotman (2004: 151–159) appelle *l'explosion*.

### 1.3. La sémiologie théâtrale en France. Les années 1970 et 1980

La sémiologie théâtrale pratiquée en France pendant les années 1970 et 1980 met en place un projet sémiologique selon lequel la représentation théâtrale doit être travaillée en immanence. Toutefois cette

immanence est mise en question par l'éphémère de la représentation théâtrale et par le fait qu'un corpus théâtral ne peut jamais correspondre à la mise en scène telle qu'elle se produit *in vivo*, lors du déroulement de l'oeuvre artistique.

En même temps et au moment où les théories de la littérature postulent la notion de *littérarité*, la sémiologie théâtrale parle de la *théâtralité* de l'oeuvre dramatique mise en scène. Un formalisme excessivement rigoureux commence à se développer autour de la notion de *système* de la représentation théâtrale. Des grammaires présentant des outils théoriques et méthodologiques dans le but d'analyser le théâtre apparaissent. Des règles générales définissant le théâtre, voire une typologie de lois systémiques au sein des genres théâtraux sont également tentées.

Parallèlement, l'accent est mis sur la sémiologie de la communication, à savoir celle du code, de l'unité minimale et de l'intentionnalité des messages. Une sémiologie qui devient un outil d'analyse plutôt qu'une sémiotique des pratiques culturelles et signifiantes. Elle s'oppose alors au programme sémiologique postulé par Roland Barthes, à savoir l'étude de "la façon dont les objets peuvent signifier dans le monde contemporain" (1985: 250).

D'une façon générale, la sémiologie du théâtre de ces deux décennies cherche donc à analyser cet objet culturel — et artistique — en tant que système *systémique* plutôt que comme système *asystémique*, pour reprendre les termes employés par Eric Buysens (1943: 37).

## 2. Le théâtre occidental: entre système et culture

Pour que la représentation théâtrale soit décrite comme un système, il faut non seulement prendre en compte le caractère autonome et la dynamique de ce dernier mais aussi sa relation au contexte culturel, social et historique dans lequel elle s'intègre. Nous nous trouvons donc face à une tension, voire une contradiction, entre la nécessité de rechercher la cohérence de l'oeuvre à l'intérieur de son propre système et une seconde nécessité qui est de rechercher sa relation au monde.

Les préoccupations de Juri Lotman témoignent de cette problématique. Lotman s'intéresse aux rapports qu'un système peut avoir avec ce qui n'est pas le système, avec, pour reprendre ses termes,

*le monde extérieur*. Il souligne dès le début de *L'explosion et la culture* que

les questions essentielles que pose tout système sémiotique sont, premièrement son rapport avec ce qui n'est pas le système, et deuxièmement, les relations entre les aspects statiques et les aspects dynamiques. La dernière question pourrait être formulée ainsi: comment un système peut-il se développer tout en restant soi-même ? (Lotman 2004: 21)

Dans le même ordre d'idées, Umberto Eco interroge le statut de l'œuvre d'art qui s'apprête à la recherche de sa genèse. Elle est "un objet dont on peut retrouver la forme originelle, telle qu'elle a été conçue par l'auteur, à travers la configuration des effets qu'elle produit sur l'intelligence et la sensibilité du consommateur" (Eco 1965: 17). Cependant, la sémiologie du théâtre de ces trente dernières années n'a pas souhaité se confronter à ce rapport entre le système et le monde. À ce sujet, Patrice Pavis écrit que

la sémiologie est préoccupée non pas par le repérage de la signification, c'est-à-dire du rapport de l'œuvre au monde (question qui revient à l'herméneutique et à la critique littéraire), mais par le mode de production du sens tout au long du processus théâtral qui va de la lecture du texte dramatique par le metteur en scène jusqu'au travail interprétatif du spectateur. (Pavis 2002: 317)

Pavis défend une sémiologie qui met l'accent sur le système et son processus de signifiante. Et pourtant Eco (1972: 24) souligne que "la sémiotique doit étudier *aussi*<sup>1</sup> les processus qui, sans impliquer directement la signification, permettent sa circulation". Il est important donc d'observer la relation susceptible d'exister entre le processus et le sens, autrement dit entre le système et le monde. Il est également nécessaire de comprendre les raisons qui ont favorisé la seule étude du processus du sens, de la signifiante, dans le domaine des recherches théâtrales.

Certains chercheurs ont avancé l'hypothèse que le caractère éphémère de la représentation théâtrale ainsi que sa nature aléatoire ne permettaient pas de faire du théâtre un objet sémiotique. Poussé à son terme, cet argument interdit non seulement l'étude sémiologique, mais, pour ainsi dire, tout regard critique sur la représentation théâtrale. Ce n'est pas parce que nous ne pouvons pas travailler le

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<sup>1</sup> Nous soulignons.

spectacle *in vivo* et que nous risquons de lui être infidèle *a posteriori*, que nous ne pouvons pas porter un regard critique sur l'œuvre théâtrale, ni tenter de relier une représentation théâtrale au monde auquel elle appartient.

La raison principale nous semble être plutôt que le propre de l'objet artistique est de ne pas dégager de significations arrêtées voire uniques, mais d'ouvrir sur une multiplicité d'interprétations et de significations. Elle fait non seulement appel à notre perception rationnelle des choses, mais également à notre perception sensorielle, donc éminemment subjective. Pour certains, cette part de subjectivité dans la relation à l'objet artistique interdit toute mise en relation méthodologique du système de l'œuvre au monde. Il nous semble toutefois, qu'à condition de préserver le caractère ouvert et hypothétique de l'analyse, le recours à des outils méthodologiques demeure non seulement possible mais souhaitable pour parvenir à cette mise en relation. D'où la nécessité de faire appel à des outils théoriques et méthodologiques capables de prendre en considération les particularités de l'œuvre artistique transformée en objet sémiotique.

### 3. La sémiologie des indices : un modèle théorique

Suivant le fil sémiologique tracé par Roland Barthes, c'est-à-dire une sémiologie des pratiques signifiantes et culturelles, le cadre théorique de la *sémiologie des indices* (Houdebine 1994: 43–46) retrouve ses ancrages dans la pensée de Ferdinand de Saussure en linguistique et de Jacques Lacan en psychanalyse. L'indice est une *forme*, une *image* privée, dans un premier temps, d'un "vouloir-dire" (Kristeva 1969: 36). L'indice ou signifiant indiciel fonctionne comme une trace psychique qu'une expérience, un événement, un son ou une image laissent auprès du sujet interprétant.

Se définissant comme structurale, indicielle et interprétative, la *sémiologie des indices* repense le système et l'immanence dans une dynamique impliquant l'évolution. Le système n'est toutefois qu'une vérité opératoire. Il est nécessaire sans pour autant être suffisant, car souple et ouvert.

Aussi l'étude d'une sémiologie théâtrale peut-elle être conçue comme un regard critique qui s'établit à travers le postulat suivant: une éventuelle structure du théâtre occidental est une expérience



sensible, vécue à travers des traces signifiantes, privées d'un vouloir-dire évident et dotées d'un vouloir-dire sous-jacent. Dans cet ordre d'idées, le théâtre peut être considéré comme un système de signes, à condition notamment de considérer ce système dans son évolution immanente mais aussi dans sa relation à la vie sociale.

#### 4. La sémiologie des indices: un modèle méthodologique

L'ouverture et l'évolution de l'œuvre artistique créent donc une dimension hypothétique de l'interprétation qui nous conduit vers la notion d'*hypothèses de sens* défendue par Anne-Marie Houdebine à travers une analyse qu'elle qualifie de systémique (1994: 273–276). Cette dernière se construit en trois étapes distinctes : la description, l'explication et l'interprétation. Elle consiste en un travail objectif et exhaustif, certes laborieux, mais dont les résultats sont riches d'informations pour l'interprétation interne du système. Le système d'un objet théâtral peut, dans un premier temps, être mis à jour à travers ce qu'Anne-Marie Houdebine appelle *l'interprétant interne*. Cette notion consiste en la mise en relation des signifiants indiciels entre eux, en la contextualisation interne des éléments formels structurant l'objet sémiotique.

Dans un deuxième temps, l'analyse doit aller au-delà de ce développement immanent, vers un développement liant le système avec une histoire donnée, une culture susceptible de l'accueillir, la mémoire du sujet interprétant, en un mot son imaginaire culturel.

C'est ensuite, nous semble-t-il, que l'analyse peut permettre *l'explosion*, telle que la définit Lotman. C'est la mise en relation des interprétants internes entre eux et leur confrontation à des *interprétants externes* qui va permettre le passage d'un processus de signifiante à des hypothèses de signification.

#### 5. En guise de conclusion: de la sémiologie théâtrale à l'anthropologie culturelle

Si nous admettons avec Eco que "toute culture doit être étudiée en tant que phénomène de communication" nous devons également accepter le fait que ce n'est pas parce que "la culture 'doit être étudiée comme'

[communication] que la culture ‘est’ communication” (Eco 1972: 26). En effet, l’objet culturel qu’est le théâtre ne renvoie pas instantanément à un processus communicationnel. Si le théâtre est un objet culturel, il n’est pas pour autant un objet sémiotique ordonné par un système de communication. En revanche, intégré dans un système culturel *intensif*, le théâtre est cette œuvre artistique dialectale, dépendant aussi bien des connaissances et des pratiques culturelles, qu’individuelles. Lier les pratiques propres au créateur d’un processus artistique aux pratiques traçant le sujet interprétant serait placer la sémiologie théâtrale dans une perspective d’anthropologie culturelle. Cette idée se trouve en accord avec la nécessité de rechercher les limites et les lois de la sémiologie qui selon Barthes “est une science parmi d’autres, nécessaire mais non suffisante” (Barthes 1957: 184).

Mais Barthes nous dit aussi que “postuler une signification, c’est recourir à la sémiologie” (Barthes 1957: 183). Il faut donc rechercher une complémentarité, un prolongement de cette science, particulièrement lorsque cette dernière s’intéresse à l’art et en l’occurrence au théâtre. Car, comme Barthes le dit encore, “le signe théâtral ne va pas de soi” (Barthes 1963: 269). Pour reprendre les termes utilisés par Jacques Fontanille (2004: 14) dans la préface de *L’explosion et la culture*, “l’innovation culturelle [est] facteur d’irréductible hétérogénéité [et] provocation à la traduction et à la valorisation *a posteriori*. Le signe en art s’offre par définition à la résistance de l’interprétation. Il est toujours pour l’analyste une provocation. C’est à dire à la fois un défi et une incitation.

Il est donc nécessaire à la sémiologie à la fois de reconnaître ses limites en circonscrivant le champ de son intervention et de s’adjoindre des complémentarités, de s’inventer des prolongements.

La recherche du rapport existant entre le système d’une œuvre et le monde est une recherche profondément établie autour de l’anthropos. Une sémiologie du théâtre pourrait, par exemple, trouver au près d’une anthropologie culturelle le prolongement nécessaire lui permettant de mettre en relation les systèmes signifiants qu’elle étudie avec des pratiques culturelles capables d’enrichir le processus de signification.

Pour paraphraser la définition saussurienne de la sémiologie, nous pourrions dire de la sémiologie du théâtre qu’elle *étudie la vie des signes théâtraux au sein du théâtre, dans leur relation à la vie sociale.*

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## От семиотики театральной репрезентации к антропологии культуры или почему театр (сопротивляется)?

В статье дается описание семиотики театра с начала XX века до современности. Сначала выделяются два периода в истории семиотики театра. Первый период охватывает работы Пражского лингвистического кружка, точнее эссе Яна Мукаржовского об искусстве и обществе и работы Индриха Хонцла по изучению знаков и системы в театре. Второй период охватывает французскую семиотику театра в конце 70-х начала 80-х гг.

Моя цель — выделить те главные причины, которые привели семиотику театра в начале 90-х годов в тупик. Начало прошлого века в семиотике театра было богатым и продуктивным, но в настоящее время говорить о театральной репрезентации в терминах знака и системы считается неподобающим. Если раньше курс семиотики театра читали и в университете, то теперь это часто невозможно. Несмотря на то, что семиотика как дисциплина в целом движется в сторону отрицания важности структуры и отказа от поисков минимального знака и кода, семиотика театра осталась верна старомодному коммуникационно-семиотическому анализу.

В данной статье я пытаюсь показать, какая часть семиотики наилучшим образом подходит для изучения театрального искусства. Предлагаю теоретическую и методологическую рамку, которая основывается на одной специфической семиотической модели: на созданной Анн-Мари Одебин «индексальной семиологии». С помощью работ Юрия Лотмана о культуре и природы эта «индексальная семиология» вкладывается мною в более широкий контекст антропологии культуры.

### **Teatraalse representatsiooni semiootikast kultuurantropoloogiani ehk miks teater (vastu paneb)?**

Käesolev artikkel kujutab endast tunnetusteoreetilist käsitlust teatrisemiootikast 20. sajandi algusest tänapäevani. Kõigepealt piiritletakse kahte perioodi teatrisemiootika ajaloos. Esimese perioodi käsitluses keskendutakse Praha strukturalistliku koolkonna töödele, täpsemalt Jan Mukařovský esseelele kunstist ja ühiskonnast ning Jindřich Honzli tööle märkide ja süsteemi uurimisel teatris. Teine käesolevas artiklis käsitletud periood puudutab teatrisemiootikat 1970ndate lõpu ja 80ndate alguse Prantsusmaal.

Artikli eesmärgiks on välja tuua need põhilised põhjused, mis viisid teatrisemiootika 90ndate alguses tupikusse. 20. sajandi algus oli teatrisemiootikas rikkalik ning viljakas, kuid tänapäeval on märgi ja süsteemi terminoloogias teatrirepresentatsioonist rääkimine vaat et taunitavgi. Ehkki varem õpetati teatrisemiootikat ka ülikoolilõengutes, pole see praegu enam sageli võimalik.

Hoolimata sellest, et semiootika kui distsipliin üldiselt on edasi liikunud struktuuri tähtsuse eitamise ning minimaalse märgi ja koodi otsingute hülgamise poole, on teatrisemiootika jäänud truuks vanamoodsale kommunikatsioonisemiootilisele analüüsile.

Käesolevas artiklis olen üritanud analüüsida, milline semiootika haru sobiks kõige paremini teatrisuguse kunstilise valdkonna uurimiseks. Teisisõnu olen ma üritanud näidata, et Lääne teater on semiootilise objektina ennekõike kunstiline ja kultuuriline nähtus. Pakun välja teoreetilise ja metodoloogilise raamistiku, mis põhineb ühel spetsiifilisel semiootilisel mudelil: Anne-Marie Houdebine'i loodud "indeksikaalsel semioloogial". Inspireerituna Juri Lotmani esseedest kultuurist ja loodusest, üritan asetada "indeksikaalset semioloogiat" laiemasse kultuuri-antropoloogia konteksti.

